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Report
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**Report on local elections in Georgia
 (2 October 2021)**

Monitoring Committee

Rapporteur:¹ David ERAY, Switzerland (R, EPP/CCE)

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Summary

Upon invitation by the Georgian authorities, the Congress deployed an observation mission to assess the local elections held in Georgia on 2 October 2021. On Election Day, nine teams involving eighteen Congress observers visited some 120 polling stations to assess the polling and counting procedures.

Overall, the Congress delegation expressed satisfaction about orderly procedures, in particular against the backdrop of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, in most of the polling stations visited. It evaluated the Election Day as generally calm, well-managed and in line with the appropriate provisions. At the same time, the observers noticed a number of irregularities that, to some extent, affected the quality of the election process. Apart from the overwhelming focus on national politics during the campaign, which overshadowed local issues, there were notable cases of undue advantage of the incumbency, misuse of the role of citizen observers acting, de facto, as party representatives, and several other inappropriate practices. Despite these flaws, democratic values and freedoms were generally respected, thus opening space for further improvement of the electoral process.

The Congress observers also noticed that, in spite of recent changes in the Georgian legislation, there is an ongoing underrepresentation of women which demonstrates the need to address this issue and ensure their adequate representation in politics.

1 L: Chamber of Local Authorities / R: Chamber of Regions
 EPP/CCE: European People's Party Group in the Congress
 SOC/G/PD: Group of Socialists, Greens and Progressive Democrats
 ILDG: Independent Liberal and Democratic Group
 ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group
 NR: Members not belonging to a political group of the Congress

RECOMMENDATION 477(2022)²

1. Following the invitation by the authorities of Georgia, dated 3 August 2021, to observe local elections held in the country on 2 October 2021, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities refers to:

a. Article 1, paragraph 2 of the Committee of Ministers' Statutory Resolution CM/Res (2020)1 on the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe;

b. the principles laid down in the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) which was ratified by Georgia on 8 December 2004;

c. Chapter XIX of the Rules and Procedures on the practical organisation of election observation missions.

2. The Congress reiterates the fact that genuinely democratic local and regional elections are part of a process to establish and maintain democratic governance and that observation of grassroots elections is a key element in the Congress' role as guardian of democracy at local and regional level.

3. The Congress is pleased that, overall, the legal framework is conducive to holding democratic elections, although the election legislation remains unnecessarily complex and excessively regulates many aspects of the process.

4. It welcomes the fact that, in spite of controversies and highly polarised atmosphere during the election campaign, the Election Day was generally calm, orderly, transparent, and well organised, despite some local incidents and isolated irregularities.

5. At the same time, the Congress regrets that the local elections were marked by allegations of intimidation, vote-buying, pressure on candidates and voters, and an unlevel playing field, emanating from the dominance of the ruling party which largely benefited from the advantage of incumbency.

6. It is regrettable that due to the protracted political crisis the local elections were excessively focused upon national political issues, thus representing a missed opportunity for the local democracy in Georgia.

7. The Congress welcomes new regulations aimed to increase the number of women in local politics which were, however, not always applied by the political parties in line with the spirit of the law resulting in a reduced number of elected female candidates.

8. In light of the above, the Congress invites the authorities of Georgia, in particular, to:

a. adopt additional legislative measures and step-up the effectiveness of existing legal provisions to prevent misuse of administrative resources in order to ensure a level playing field in elections;

b. introduce effective measures to fight hate speech and fake news online as a means to decrease polarisation of election campaigns;

c. strengthen existing provisions to increase participation of women in local politics, and ensure their effective implementation;

d. consider introducing provisions to prevent the practice of representatives of election observation organisations acting, de facto, as party supporters;

e. strengthen the regulatory framework ensuring transparency and accountability of campaign finances.

² Approved by the Chamber of Local Authorities on 23 March 2022 and adopted by the Congress on 23 March 2022, 2nd sitting (see Document CPL(2022)42-02, explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: David ERAY, Switzerland (R, EPP/CCE).

9. The Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly and other relevant institutions of the Council of Europe to take account of this Recommendation regarding the 2021 local elections in Georgia and of the explanatory memorandum in their activities relating to this member State.

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

1. INTRODUCTION³

1. Following the invitation by the authorities of Georgia, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe deployed a mission to observe the local elections on 2 October in 64 municipalities. The mission, headed by David ERAY (Switzerland, EPP/CCE, R), was part of a joint observation, International Election Observation Mission (IEOM), together with the OSCE/ODIHR and the European Parliament.

2. The election observation mission took place from 30 September until 3 October 2021 and consisted of 18 Congress observers from 15 countries. On Election Day, nine Congress teams were deployed to different cities, towns, and adjacent rural areas across the country. The composition of the delegation, the programme, and deployment plan can be found in the appendices.

3. The following report focuses specifically on issues arising out of exchanges held with Congress interlocutors in the context of the 2 October 2021 local elections in Georgia. The Congress wishes to thank all those who met with the delegation for their open and constructive dialogue, including the Central Election Commission, the international community, representatives of political parties and of non-governmental organisations.

2. POLITICAL CONTEXT

4. The 2021 local elections were called by the President of Georgia on 2 August 2021 to be held two months later, on 2 October. The elections, in which the voters were supposed to elect 64 mayors and 2 068 members of local councils (*Sakrebulo*s) in 59 self-governing communities and five self-governing cities including Tbilisi, thus took place in all 64 municipalities of Georgia.

5. The local elections need to be seen also in the context of the parliamentary elections, held in October 2020, which resulted in the victory of Georgian Dream (GD). Consequently, following the series of electoral victories since 2012, Georgian Dream has continued to be dominant political force having majority not only in Parliament but also at the local level, having won in the last local elections 62 of 64 mayoral seats and a majority in 63 of 64 local councils.

6. The 2020 parliamentary elections generated a wave of dissatisfaction among the opposition who alleged massive electoral fraud, boycotted the second round and refused to participate in the work of the new Parliament. On 19 April 2021, after lengthy and difficult negotiations, an agreement, brokered by the European Union, on electoral reform was reached stating, inter alia, that early parliamentary elections would be held in 2022 if the ruling party did not reach 43 per cent of the proportional votes in the upcoming local elections.⁴ Despite the agreement, given the substantial tension between Georgian Dream and most parties of the opposition, the pre-election environment was marked by deep polarisation, the local elections being often perceived and presented as a national referendum about the government and a way to achieve snap parliamentary elections.

7. Shortly before the elections, the heated atmosphere intensified with a series of revelations in the media indicating that the State Security Service had been extensively engaged in spying on numerous political and public actors in all ranks of the society, including the Church, suggesting how widespread such a surveillance might be, and causing a huge turmoil in various spheres of Georgian society. The overall political atmosphere further deteriorated with the arrival of the former President and founder of the United National Movement party, Mikheil SAKASHVILI, who returned to the country from abroad on the eve of elections which created additional tensions and fears of possible post-election turmoil.

³ Prepared with the contribution of expert Prof. Pavel PSEJA, Czech Republic, member of the Group of Independent Experts on the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

⁴ <https://euneighbours.eu/en/east/stay-informed/news/charles-michel-publishes-new-proposal-georgian-political-parties-resolve>

3. ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE AT LOCAL AND REGIONAL LEVEL

8. Georgia is divided into 64 municipalities including 5 self-governing cities (Batumi, Kutaisi, Rustavi, Poti, and the capital Tbilisi) and 59 self-governing communities. Moreover, there are 9 regions (*mkarebi*)⁵ that are administered by the Governors, appointed by the Prime Minister, whose task is to coordinate the work of municipalities.

9. The territorial structure of Georgia is governed by the Constitution⁶, and the Local Self-Government Code⁷, last amended in June 2017, which explicitly refers to the European Charter of Local Self-Government. The 2017 amendments created two municipal bodies: the Municipal Council (*Sakrebulo*) and the Mayor or Town Manager (*Gamgebeli*). The Mayor/Town Manager, the highest representative of a municipality, is directly elected by citizens for a four-year term under the majoritarian system. Overall, municipalities in Georgia are composed of three bodies: the Municipal Council, the City Hall and the Mayor/Town Manager.

10. The Municipal Councils have powers and competences in such areas as budget, property and land resources, local taxes, territorial planning as well as construction permits. Their members are directly elected for a four-year term. The City Hall is appointed and presided by the Mayor. It is subordinated to the executive body of the Municipality and oversees the implementation of the decisions taken by the Municipal Council.

11. The City of Tbilisi has a special status regulated by the Article 10 of the Constitution of Georgia, the Law on the Capital of Georgia–City of Tbilisi, and the Local Self-Government Code. Tbilisi is administered by a fifty-member City Council, a City Hall, and a Mayor. The territory of the city is divided into ten administrative districts (*Raions*), whose Heads (*Gamgebeli*) are appointed by the Mayor of Tbilisi.

4. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND ELECTORAL SYSTEM

12. The local elections are primarily regulated by the 1995 Constitution and the 2011 Election Code. Further regulation is provided by the 1997 Law on Political Unions of Citizens, supplemented by regulations promulgated by the Central Election Commission (CEC).⁸ Local elections shall be called by the President of Georgia not later than 60 days before the expiration of the term of office of local elected representatives.

13. On 28 June 2021, following the political agreement aimed at resolving a political deadlock, which was the result of the 2020 parliamentary elections, the legal framework was substantially amended. To limited extent, these amendments addressed a number of OSCE/ODIHR and Venice Commission recommendations⁹ although some others, e.g. those related to campaigning and campaign finance, have not been taken into account.

14. Although the amendments had been adopted shortly before the elections were called, which is not in line with generally accepted good practices, they were implemented following the consultations with a broad range of stakeholders and on the basis of the agreement of 19 April 2021.

15. The amendments introduced a higher proportional component for local elections as well as mandatory random recounts and additional measures to address voter intimidation. They also addressed the misuse of state resources for campaigning (including the office resources), modified the composition and appointment of election commissions, and extended the timeframes for dispute resolution. Further elements included introduction of IT technologies in some aspects of the electoral process, e.g. registration of voters at polling stations, pilot counting of the votes in selected polling stations, and drawing up of summary protocols of results.

5 The 9 regions are: Guria, Imereti, Kakheti, Kvemo Kartli, Mtskheta-Mtianeti, Racha-Lechkhumi/Kvemo-Svaneti, Samegrelo/Zemo-Svaneti, Samtskhe-Javakheti and Shida-Kartli. However, these regions are not units of self-government.

6 See <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/download/2244429/15/en/pdf>.

7 Article 6, Local Self-Government Code.

8 Other applicable legal provisions include the 2004 Law on Broadcasting, 1999 Criminal Code, 1984 Administrative Offences Code, 1999 Administrative Proceedings Code and 1999 General Administrative Code.

9 See previous [ODIHR election observation reports on Georgia](#) and the Venice Commission and ODIHR Urgent Joint [Opinions](#) on the Draft Amendments to the Election Code.

16. The elections to the Municipal Councils (*Sakrebulo*) and for the Mayors (*Gamgebeli*) are to be held every four years in October. To qualify for seat allocation in the *Sakrebulo*, party lists must receive at least three per cent of the valid votes (2.5 per cent in Tbilisi). Majoritarian and mayoral candidates with the most votes are elected in the first round in case they receive more than 40 and 50 per cent of the votes respectively. Provided no candidate succeeds to obtain the required percentage of the votes, a second round is to be held within four weeks between the two front-runners (30 October 2021).¹⁰

17. In case of the Municipal Councils, the elections are conducted through a mixed system with a 4/1 ratio of proportional and majoritarian mandates for the five largest cities (35 councillors) and 2/1 for all other 59 municipalities (from 18 to 59 councillors). The composition of the Municipal Council depends on the status of the Municipalities (City/Community) and on the number of inhabitants. Candidates who wish to compete for majoritarian mandates can be nominated by political parties and registered initiative groups of five voters.

18. The amendments to the electoral law increased the overall number of proportionally elected seats from 970 to 1404, reduced the number of majoritarian seats from 1088 to 664, and delineated the boundaries of 59 majoritarian constituencies. *Sakrebulo* of Tbilisi¹¹ is composed of 50 members, of which 10 are elected in single-member constituencies and 40 by a proportional system. In accordance with the law, ten single-member constituencies of the Tbilisi Municipality were delineated by the CEC within five days after the elections had been called. The constituencies for the remaining four largest cities were delineated by the District Election Commissions (DECs) by 1 August 2021 as required by Georgian law.

5. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

19. The electoral administration has three levels composed of the Central Election Commission (CEC), 73 District Election Commissions (DECs), and 3664 Precinct Election Commissions (PECs, i.e. polling stations). The CEC and DECs are permanent bodies whose members are appointed individually for five-year mandates.

20. Following the April 2021 agreement the composition of all commissions, as well as the election of the CEC Chairperson and non-partisan members, was modified to achieve more balanced representation and thus enhanced public trust. Commissions at all levels now have up to 17 members: eight non-partisan and up to nine appointed by political parties. This has led to a significant increase in the number of members of the respective bodies.

21. The CEC is constituted as an independent administrative body and is the supreme electoral authority responsible for the organisation and conduct of all elections and referenda in the country.¹² The eight CEC non-partisan members, including the Chair, were elected by the Parliament from candidates put forward by the President following the proposal from a “competition commission” composed of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and academia. For their election, a two-third qualified majority is required. If not reached, the commissioners can be elected through an “anti-deadlock” mechanism of simple majority, with a term limited to six-months instead of five years.¹³ Up to nine parliamentary parties can appoint one CEC member each. In case the number of parliamentary parties is higher than nine, priority would be given to those with the highest number of votes in the previous parliamentary elections.

22. The DECs represent permanent territorial bodies of the election administration of Georgia and their composition, like those of PECs, mirrors the model applied at the CEC level. In electoral periods, the five permanent DEC members are joined by three non-partisan members selected by the CEC, and not more than nine DEC members appointed by political parties.

¹⁰ The second round of local elections held on 30 October 2021 was not observed by the Congress.

¹¹ The City of Tbilisi has a special status based upon the Article 10 of the Constitution of Georgia, the Law on the Capital of Georgia – City of Tbilisi, and the Local Self-Government Code.

¹² The CEC is responsible for the conduct of general elections also in the Autonomous Republic of Ajara. However, the Supreme Election Commission of Ajara (SEC) runs electoral processes specific to the Autonomous Republic, and in case parliamentary elections and the elections of the Supreme Council of Ajara are held simultaneously, the SEC compiles on its own only the results for the Supreme Council.

¹³ After two failed attempts at two thirds majority, two more attempts are taken, one to achieve 60 per cent majority and then a simple majority.

23. For the 2021 local elections, a total of 3664 PECs were established as temporary territorial bodies of the electoral administration.¹⁴ Each precinct consists of no less than 20 and no more than 1500 voters. The eight non-partisan PEC members are elected by a two-third majority (or a simple majority in the second-round vote) of DEC members; however, the timeframe for selection of PEC members was tight as DECs elected 29 312 non-partisan PECs members from 31 483 candidates in a period of only four days. In accordance with pertinent legal provisions, 903 candidates were excluded for having been party appointed commissioners in the last general elections. Approximately 59 per cent of the PECs had exactly eight candidates for the eight non-partisan vacancies.

24. The training programme for PEC members, divided into six stages, was properly organised and included, inter alia, the basic principles of democratic elections, duties of PEC members and sanctions for their breach, communication between PECs and DECs, and activities of PECs in the period up to the election day. The CEC training centre offered comprehensive educational programmes.

6. VOTER REGISTRATION AND VOTERS' LISTS

25. All Georgian citizens who turn 18 by the day of the election have the right to vote except those who serve a prison sentence for a particularly grave crime or have been declared legally incapacitated by a court decision and placed in an inpatient care facility¹⁵.

26. Voter registration is passive, continuous, and centralised. The unified voters list is compiled by the CEC on the basis of data extracted by the Public Service Development Agency (PSDA) under the Ministry of Justice and a range of other State institutions¹⁶. The data are based on updates provided quarterly as well as prior to elections.

27. Preliminary voters' lists were displayed for public verification through a number of possibilities: online, in 12,780 quick payment terminals, and in most PECs. Voters with disabilities including blind voters, deaf voters, and voters with hearing impairment were able to verify their data through adapted CEC website and video call service¹⁷.

28. The final voter lists contained 3497 345 voters, including 74 550 on mobile voter lists. 6 074 voters were transferred on the special lists due to COVID-19 including 3 822 for patients in hospitals, 147 in quarantine and 1 198 in self-isolation.¹⁸

29. There were several categories of voters who were not able to vote at their designated PEC due to specific reasons stipulated in the Election Code¹⁹. These voters could submit a request for absentee voting or mobile ballot box and be added to special voter lists which were compiled by DECs on the basis of lists of eligible individuals handed over to the respective DECs five or six days before the elections. DECs approved the lists and transferred them to the respective PECs.

7. REGISTRATION OF PARTIES AND CANDIDATES

30. Georgian citizens who turned 21 years before or on Election Day and have resided in Georgia for at least five years can be elected as members of a *Sakrebulo*. To run for the office of mayor, a candidate needs to be at least 25 years old and have the right to vote. The Election Code specifies a number of

¹⁴ Except PECs for voters in quarantine and special precincts, set up in exceptional cases, which include deployments of military personnel of the Ministry of Defense of Georgia abroad, the penitentiary institution, hospitals and other inpatient facilities, shelters for the elderly, homeless shelters, shelters for people with special needs, and other social facilities where the number of voters exceeds 50.

¹⁵ However, such general exclusions are at odds with international standards and ODIHR recommendations, see the [2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#).

¹⁶ These include the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs, municipal authorities, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Georgian Intelligence Service, Special Penitentiary Service, State Security Service of Georgia, and the Agency for State Care.

¹⁷ Adapted access to the CEC website was provided through <https://cesko.ge/geo/static/2154>, and videoservice was available at <https://videocall.cec.gov.ge/?page=index>.

¹⁸ Only voters that are registered with the authorities were added to these lists. Voters in self-isolation registered as at home due to COVID-19 were required to call CEC hotline between 25 and 27 September. Only those voters who resided in their electoral district, were able to vote.

¹⁹ See Art.32(1) of the Election Code.

public office positions that are not compatible with candidacies for elected positions in local administration²⁰.

31. The candidates for mayors and for majoritarian seats in *Sakrebulos* can be nominated by political parties or by initiative groups of at least five voters, while candidates for proportionally elected seats can be nominated only by parties. To be able to nominate the candidates, parties and initiative groups had to first register with the CEC and DEC, respectively. Parties that did not register for the last parliamentary elections or did not have a parliamentary seat at the time when the local elections had been called, had to present 25 000 supporting signatures to the CEC. Initiative groups had to supplement each candidacy with support signatures.²¹

32. Overall, the CEC registered 43 parties and 68 initiative groups. The parties and initiative groups successfully registered 239 mayoral candidates (12 independents), 2 769 majoritarian candidates (56 independents) and 770 proportional lists with 20 624 candidates. There were 25 women running for mayor (10 per cent), 488 for majoritarian seats (17 per cent), and 8 767 on the candidate lists (42,5 per cent).

33. There were relatively high numbers of withdrawals before the Election Day, some of them allegedly because of pressure exerted by the authorities. In sum, 14 proportional lists and more than 617 proportional candidates for *Sakrebulo*, a third of them women, withdrew; there were also withdrawals by 102 majoritarian and three mayoral candidates. Nineteen political parties were affected by the withdrawals; however, none of these came from among the candidates of the ruling party. The Congress delegation was informed of such withdrawals due to allegedly exerted pressure on candidates during its preliminary meetings with different stakeholders.

34. While new regulations had been applied prior to the elections to increase the number of women on candidate lists by placing at least one in every three candidates of the opposite gender on the ballot, in practice women were almost always placed as the third, sixth or ninth candidate, thus having much lower chances to get elected than their male counterparts. This was reported by the Congress interlocutors as a major obstacle to a higher representation of women in local politics going against the spirit of the newly adopted regulations.

8. ELECTION OBSERVATION

35. Local non-profit organisations that were registered as legal entities at least one year before the Election Day were allowed to register as election observers. At the moment of registration, their statute or another founding document must provide for the monitoring of elections and/or the protection of human rights. Provided they intend to observe in more than one district, the citizen observer organisations are registered by the CEC; in the other cases they need to submit their registration documents to respective DEC.

36. The status of domestic observers is not compatible with the position of public official, member of a political party, of a municipal council, mayor and deputy mayor, judge, public servant at the Ministries of Defence and Internal Affairs or within the system of the Ministry of Justice, election official or representative of the press. An observer cannot represent more than one organisation.

37. By 27 August 2021, the CEC had accredited 56 local organisations²², while three local organisations were refused registration²³. 52 international observer groups and 89 media outlets were registered to observe the elections. Most notably, international observers from the OSCE/ODIHR and from the European Parliament were invited and accredited by the authorities to observe the elections, in close co-operation with the Congress delegation.

20 For example, the President, Ministers, State representatives (governors), judges, prosecutors, Ombudsperson, etc. (Art. 136). In addition, candidates may not be members of another representative body or mayor of other self-governing city/community.

21 The numbers were defined by the CEC for each majoritarian constituency or mayoral seat separately. In general, it was set at one per cent of the registered voters within a constituency, though not fewer than 50.

22 The list of observer organisations is available on the CEC website <https://cesko.ge/geo/list/show/124221-munitsipalitetis-organota-2021-tslis-archevnebitvis-tseskoshi-registrirebuli-adgilobrivi-damkvirvebeli-organizatsiebi>.

23 The CEC initially refused to accept the registration of the Institute for Law and Policy research, and of Public Opinion Research Centre but both these entities were registered later on. The refusal to accredit Regional Association of Social Workers remained valid due to the fact that their founding documents do not provide for election monitoring and/or protection of human rights.

38. Electoral subjects – parties, electoral blocs, initiative groups of voters – can nominate two representatives to every election commission; however, only one of them is entitled to attend a session of an election commission at a time. On Election Day, representatives of electoral subjects enjoy the same rights and access to electoral procedures as citizen and international observers.

9. ELECTION CAMPAIGN

39. The official campaign period began on 3 August 2021, 60 days before the Election Day. The campaign was generally calm but competitive, most prominently in the media and online. Many parties reduced door-to-door and in-person campaign activities and no large campaign events were held due to COVID-19 related concerns. Of all the parties participating in the elections, the ruling one was by far the most visible all over the country through numerous billboards and posters.

40. Even if a large majority of the candidates could campaign freely, some cases of physical and verbal violence were noted and aggressive rhetoric, particularly on social networks, intensified closer to the Election Day, including hate speech and widespread misinformation as reported by different stakeholders met by the Congress delegation. The allegations of electoral malpractice from both opposition and ruling party were relatively frequent during the campaign, with the ruling party also accusing opposition parties of planning a post-election unrest²⁴. Overall, the local topics were often overshadowed by national politics, as the 43 per cent threshold remained the key concern of all parties.

41. Before the Election Day, there were widespread and repeated allegations of vote-buying, misuse of administrative resources, intimidation and pressure, made by voters, candidates and political parties alike. Moreover, there were also occasional claims indicating that when intimidation was reported to the authorities it was not properly investigated.²⁵

10. PARTY AND CAMPAIGN FINANCING

42. The legal framework for political party and campaign finances is mainly regulated by the Election Code, the Law on Political Unions of Citizens, the Law on the State Audit Office (SAO), and supplemented by pertinent regulations. However, there are significant legislative shortcomings and limited enforcement of the regulatory framework which affect transparency and accountability of campaign finances.

43. All electoral subjects, regardless of whether they are political parties, candidates, or initiative groups of voters, can use their own funds. In addition, individuals and legal entities may annually donate money or in-kind contributions up to GEL 60 000 (app. EUR 15 796) and GEL 120 000 (app. EUR 31 413) respectively, to one or more parties or candidates. The total amount of donations from legal entities may not exceed 120 000 GEL annually. A party is allowed to take a loan for campaign purposes but only from commercial banks operating in Georgia and not exceeding GEL 1 000 000 million (EUR 261 780) in total over a calendar year. Moreover, the donations may not be made anonymously, through intermediaries, or donors whose official income may not be considered sufficient²⁶. There also are substantial imbalances in real-world availability of campaign resources that clearly contribute to the uneven playing field.

44. Contestants in the elections may spend up to GEL 15 per registered voter, approximately GEL 50 million annually nationwide for parties, including all annual expenditures and spending incurred by third parties. Furthermore, it is prohibited to make donations from state entities, legal entities of public law, state organisations and enterprises, or from non-commercial legal persons, foreigners, foreign entities, stateless persons, and international and religious organisations.

24 On the eve of the elections, the former president Mikhail Saakashvili entered Georgia just to be immediately arrested, having been sentenced in absentia in 2018 for abuse of office. However, the fears that his arrest may result in widespread demonstrations did not completely take shape.

25 There were reports from all regions that the ruling party promised voters and potential candidates of other parties jobs, food donations or cash in return for their support, and that it threatened the opposition candidates, donors, and supporters with job dismissals and removals of social benefits for them and their families. Moreover, Georgian Public Defender expressed concerns as regards alleged discriminatory dismissals of employees for their political views in the run-up to the elections.

26 All campaign transactions must be conducted through dedicated campaign funds, and monetary donations, regardless of the amount, must be transferred from a donor's bank account.

11. THE MEDIA

45. The media environment is diverse but partisan and strongly polarised, reflecting the existing divisions between the ruling and opposition parties. Television remains the main source of political information, although online media are gaining ground as news sources mostly in urban centres. Georgia is ranked 60th out of 180 countries on the 2021 Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index²⁷. According to a survey by the International Republican Institute (IRI), published in June 2021, television, along with social networks, is the main source of information for 89 per cent of respondents²⁸. According to the yearly report by the Georgian media regulator in 2020 a total of 89 TV and 53 radio broadcasters operated in Georgia²⁹.

46. The media legal framework provides a reasonable basis to guarantee freedoms of expression and the media. However, the deterioration of the media environment due to cases of alleged intimidation and threats against journalists raises concerns about the ability of media to function in a safe and secure environment. According to various reports, cases of violation of the rights of media representatives reached a critical level³⁰. The most violent case of the attacks against the press occurred on 5 July 2021 when right-wing groups in an effort to prevent the Tbilisi Pride March from taking place attacked 53 journalists, subjecting them to physical and verbal abuse, and deliberately destroying their equipment. The raising level of verbal violence online and in particular in the social networks was reported by the Congress interlocutors as a great matter of concern.

47. The Georgian law stipulates, inter alia, that all broadcasters should ensure pluralistic and non-discriminatory coverage of all relevant views in their news programmes, follow the principle of impartiality and fairness in reporting, and provide rules for the publication of opinion polls. It also guarantees the allocation of free airtime on all national channels to parties on an equal basis and equal conditions for paid advertising. Based on the results of the previous parliamentary elections, 14 political parties qualified for free airtime³¹.

48. The overall coverage provided by national television channels was extensive and mostly focused on three parties – GD, UNM and For Georgia – and on the government. Reportedly, all together they received 68 per cent of the electoral coverage monitored by the OSCE/ODIHR. The coverage provided by the most relevant private television channels was mostly partisan and reflected their political preferences.³²

12. COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

49. The legal framework for resolution of electoral disputes is complex and imposes some limitations on the types of cases that can be brought to election administration bodies and courts by voters, thus being at odds with international standards³³. According to the Georgian law, registered contestants and accredited domestic observer organisations may file complaints against decisions of the election commissions and violations of the election legislation. Voters can file complaints only if they are not included in a voters' list, and on the voting procedures in the polling station on Election Day. Complaints can also be filed electronically by representatives of contestants and civil society organisations registered on an electronic platform³⁴.

²⁷ <https://rsf.org/en/georgia>

²⁸ IRI, Public Opinion Survey Residents of Georgia, June 2021. Available at https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/iri_poll_presentation_georgia_june_2021_public_release.pdf.

²⁹ Based on the data gathered by IRI survey, Imedi TV is the most trusted channel, followed by Mtavari Arkhi TV, Rustavi 2, and Pirveli TV.

³⁰ These reports include those presented by Freedom House, Transparency International Georgia, Reporters Without Borders, and the International Press Union.

³¹ Eleven parties actually decided to use free airtime provided on public and private national TV stations. "Unqualified" political parties received significantly less free airtime and only on the public media.

³² Please see the [OSCE/ODIHR report](#) about the first round of local elections.

³³ Paragraph 5.10 of the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#) states that everyone shall have an effective means of redress against administrative decisions so as to guarantee respect for fundamental rights and ensure legal integrity. Guideline II.3.3.3.f of the [Code of Good Practice](#) provides that "all candidates and all voters registered in the constituency concerned must be entitled to appeal".

³⁴ The CEC provides a standardized form for filing complaints and keeps a database of complaints at <http://sachivrebi.cec.gov.ge/>.

50. Before the elections, 446 complaints were filed to election commissions, including 256 by electoral contestants and 190 by citizen observers. Of these, over 240 complaints were filed by the UNM party alone. Approximately 190 complaints, related to alleged violations by PEC and DEC members, were subject to a 30-day deadline and not reviewed prior to Election Day, affecting the effective remedy. Most of the complaints were rejected on merits as unsubstantiated. Overall, the reviews of complaints in the CEC sessions and courts were made in an open manner, with due respect to the procedural requirements, and decisions were published within legal timeframes.

51. The Prosecutor's Office received 35 reports alleging vote-buying and launched five investigations. The Ministry of Interior launched 68 investigations concerning election-related violence and property damage.

13. NATIONAL MINORITIES

52. National minorities make up 13.2 per cent of the population with the most numerous national minority groups being the ethnic Azeri (6.3 per cent) and Armenians (4.5 per cent), both of them concentrated in Georgia's southern border regions. Any other national minority, including Russians, remain below 1.0 per cent of the population. While persons belonging to national minorities ran as mayoral and *Sakrebulo* candidates in some areas densely populated by national minorities, in Tbilisi and other areas where minorities also reside, they remained underrepresented.

53. According to the data provided by CEC, among mayoral candidates in municipalities there were six Armenian speakers, three Azeri speakers, and one other language speaker. Among majoritarian candidates, there were 102 Azeri speaking (2 female), 100 Armenian speaking (17 female), and 13 speakers of other languages (6 female). Among party list candidates, there were 472 Azeri speakers (80 female), 559 Armenian speakers (225 female), and 150 other language speakers (85 female).

54. Georgian Election Code includes provisions for translation of voter lists, ballots, summary results protocols, and polling day logbooks, into minority languages. The CEC established 348 PECs in electoral districts densely populated by ethnic minorities (211 Georgian-Azeri, 133 Georgian-Armenian, and 4 Georgian-Azeri-Armenian), and provided election materials and training for these PECs in the Armenian and Azeri languages³⁵. The CEC also operates a tri-lingual hotline in the Georgian, Azeri, and Armenian languages.

14. ELECTION DAY

55. The Election Day as observed by the Congress observers, as well as from the perspective of International Election Observation Mission observers in general, was overall calm and orderly although few cases of irregularities were reported. Nine Congress observer teams operated in 9 regions, including 25 areas of observation, and observed the opening, voting, and counting procedures in some 120 polling stations. In almost all cases, the polling stations observed opened on time and if not, there were only small delays due to organisational issues. Despite efforts to improve accessibility, Congress observers noticed that quite a high number of the polling stations observed were not easily accessible for wheelchair users.

56. The voting process was mostly well organised, transparent, and without any substantial issues. However, the Congress observers noticed isolated cases of overcrowding which challenged adherence to the COVID-19 related rules, as well as inappropriate layout. Wearing masks, using hand-sanitisers and keeping distance was not always consistent and the latter, in some cases, even impossible due to the confined space. There were also allegations concerning voters to be brought to the polling station in an organised way. None of these, however, substantially interfered with the generally appropriate conduct of the election process in the visited polling stations. Nevertheless, despite legal prohibition to gather within 100 meters around a polling station, Congress observers noted the presence of groups of individuals in the immediate surroundings in a number of polling stations observed, which raised some doubts about the ability of voters to cast their vote free from pressure.

57. There was an extensive presence of party and candidate representatives as well as citizen observers in all polling stations visited by the Congress observers. They noticed a relatively high number

35 See <https://cesko.ge/eng/list/show/124571-Information-for-Ethnic-Minorities-2021>.

of cases of citizen observers who seemed to act on behalf of parties and candidates which goes against the principles of domestic citizen observation.³⁶

58. As regards the counting process, the Congress observers generally confirmed that it was conducted in a transparent and appropriate manner. Those cases where irregularities were observed, were mostly due to procedural errors. About 370 complaints were filed to DEC's on Election Day alleging various procedural violations at PECs. Over 250 of these requested disciplinary sanctions against PEC members while the remaining requested an entry in the administrative protocol to refer the cases to the court.

15. TURNOUT AND ELECTION RESULTS³⁷

59. According to the information provided by CEC, the total turnout for the first round of the local elections was 51.92 %, i.e. about 6 % higher than in 2017. In the first round, 44 mayors were elected, all of them representing the ruling Georgian Dream party. Consequently, the second round was held in 20 municipalities (15 communities, 5 cities) on 30 October 2021. The candidates of the Georgian Dream competed in all of these, mostly facing (17 municipalities) the candidates of UNM (furthermore, one candidate was from For Georgia, one from United Georgia, and one run as independent). Only one female candidate was elected mayor while two more qualified for the second round.

60. Overall, the Georgian Dream (GD) party won having received 46.74 per cent of the vote, the United National Movement (UNM), major opposition party, received 30.68 per cent of the vote while For Georgia party garnered 7.79 per cent of the vote. All other parties finished up with under three per cent of the vote. Of the 1 404 proportional seats, 441 were won by women (31.4 per cent). In 622 of the 664 majoritarian constituencies, a winner was declared in the first round, 47 of them women (7.6 per cent). The GD won 90 per cent of these seats, UNM 8.5 per cent, other parties less than one per cent. Georgian Dream representatives will thus be able to constitute majority in most of the *Sakrebulo*s.

61. In line with the June 2021 amendments which prescribed mandatory random recounts of the electoral results, the CEC recounted votes in 812 of 3 664 district election commissions, of which 360 were randomly selected³⁸. In addition, DEC's conducted 194 recounts based on complaints or their own initiative, and following the CEC recommendation, 257 additional recounts were conducted, with each DEC recounting an average of four additional PECs. Overall, according to the information provided by the CEC, the results in more than 66 per cent of the 812 district election commissions remained the same, while minor errors, which could not make any influence on the 2 October Local Election results, have been found.

16. CONCLUSIONS

62. Despite a legal framework which is overall conducive to holding democratic elections, the election legislation in Georgia still remains unnecessarily complex and excessively regulates many aspects of the process. Consequently, it is desirable to support its further refinement to address existing shortcomings. The overall unlevel playing field, emanating from the dominance of the ruling party, pressure on voters, and alleged cases of vote-buying were further features of these elections which raised concern of the Congress delegation. Moreover, frequently observed practice of domestic observer organisation representatives acting as party supporters as well as the intimidating presence of party activists outside some polling stations were another source of concern of the Congress observers.

63. The Election Day was generally calm, orderly, transparent, and well organised. While the observers noticed some inconsistencies, for example with regard to the layout of the polling stations, overcrowding, and violations of the new regulation on the 100-meter perimeter around polling stations, they did not observe any major shortcomings systematically hampering democratic voting

³⁶ According to ODIHR, party and candidate representatives and citizen observers were present in 83.1 per cent of polling stations observed, and in 36.1 per cent of polling stations observed there were indications of citizen observers acting on behalf of parties or candidates. See the [OSCE/ODIHR report](#).

³⁷ For the full results, please see <https://cesko.ge/en/archevnebi/2021>.

³⁸ The CEC stated that recounts slightly modified the figures in 121 out of 360 PECs results protocols, however – with one exception of a seat reassigned – without relevant impact upon the election results.

64. From the perspective of the Congress delegation, due to protracted political crisis the elections were excessively focused upon national political issues, thus representing a missed opportunity for the local democracy in Georgia. Moreover, while new regulations had been applied prior to the elections to increase the number of women on candidate lists by placing at least one in every three candidates of the opposite gender on the ballot, in practice women were almost always placed as the third, sixth or ninth candidate, thus having much lower chances to get elected than their male counterparts.

65. Overall, although the general environment before and on the Election Day was largely in line with internationally recognised standards, there is relevant space for improvement in the regulation of the election process, access to the resources, or genuinely open and impartial treatment of the candidates and voters alike.

APPENDIX I

CONGRESS ELECTION OBSERVATION MISSION
Local elections in Georgia – 2 October 2021
FINAL PROGRAMME

Wednesday, 22 September 2021

14:45 – 15:45 Remote briefing with Ms Natalia VOUTOVA, Head of Council of Europe Office in Georgia
 Venue: Bluejeans (Central European Time)

Wednesday, 29 September 2021

Various times Arrival of the Congress delegation in Tbilisi

Thursday, 30 September 2021

08:30 – 09:00 Welcome to the delegation
 Venue: Radisson Blu Tbilisi, Iveria Ballroom

09:05 – 10:05 Briefing with representatives of the diplomatic corps in Tbilisi

- Armenia, Mr Levon ZARKARIAN, Advisor
- Czech Republic, Ambassador, Mr Petr MIKYSKA
- France, Ambassador Mr Diego COLAS and Mr Ethan GRAY, task officer
- Hungary, Ms Anikó FARKAS, Consul
- Italy, Ambassador Mr Enrico VALVO
- Switzerland, Mr Urs BEER, Charge d’Affaires

Venue: Radisson Blu Tbilisi, Iveria Ballroom

10:10 – 11:10 Briefing with domestic NGOs

- International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED)
 Ms Nino DOLIDZE, Executive Director
- Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association (GYLA)
 Mr Nika SIMONISHVILI, Chairperson
- Transparency International Georgia (TI),
 Mr Levan NATROSHVILI, Election Programme Manager

Venue: Radisson Blu Tbilisi, Iveria Ballroom

11:15 – 12:15 Briefing with media representatives from the Coalition for Media Advocacy

- Ms Tamar KINTSURASHVILI, Media Development Foundation
- Ms Eka BASILAIA, Media Rights

Venue: Radisson Blu Tbilisi, Iveria Ballroom

12:15 – 13:30 Lunch break

14:00 – 16:00 Joint briefing with the Delegation of the European Parliament and Core Team of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission to Georgia

- Ambassador Albert JÓNSSON, Head of Mission
- Ms Urdur GUNNARSDOTTIR, Political Analyst
- Ms Giovanna MAIOLA, Media Analyst
- Ms Elissavet KARAGIANNIDOU, Legal Analyst
- Mr Peter MICHALIK, Election Analyst
- Mr László BELÁGYI, Security Expert

Venue: Radisson Blu Tbilisi, Iveria Ballroom

- 16:05 – 16:35 Regional briefing with OSCE/ODIHR Long Term Observers based in Tbilisi
- Ms Ewa JACOBSSON, Long-term observer (Sweden)
 - Mr Daniel DRIGOT, Long-term observer (USA)
- Venue: Radisson Blu Tbilisi, Iveria Ballroom
- 16:40 – 17:10 Debriefing
Venue: Radisson Blu Tbilisi, Iveria Ballroom
- 17:15 – 17:45 Technical briefing with drivers and interpreters
Venue: Radisson Blu Tbilisi, Iveria Ballroom

Friday, 1 October 2021

- 08:30 – 09:00 Briefing of the day
Venue: Radisson Blu Tbilisi, Iveria Ballroom
- 09:05 – 10:05 Briefing with representatives of international NGOs
- The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), Ms Ketevan MAISURADZE, Country Director
 - National Democratic Institute (NDI), Mr Alan GILLAM, Country Director
 - International Republican Institute (IRI), Mr John P. DIPIRRO, Resident Program Director
- Venue: Radisson Blu Tbilisi, Iveria Ballroom
- 10:30 – 11:30 Briefing with the Central Election Commission
- Mr Giorgi KALANDARISHVILI, Chairperson
 - Mr Giorgi SHARABIDZE, Deputy-chairperson
 - Mr Giorgi SIORIDZE, Deputy-chairperson
 - Ms Tamar KAPANADZE, Head of International Relations and Protocol
 - Mr Giorgi SANTURIANI, Head of Legal Department
- Venue: Office of the Central Election Commission, 24 Gorgasali Street, Tbilisi
- 11:30 – 14:00 Lunch break
- 14:00 approx. Departure of teams deployed to the regions – (Team 3 and Team 6)
- 14:05 – 14:50 Briefing with Mr David MELUA, Executive Director of the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG)
Venue: Radisson Blu Tbilisi, Iveria Ballroom

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| 15:00 – 16:00 | First meeting of heads of delegations to discuss the preliminary statement with OSCE/ODIHR and the Delegation of the European Parliament
Venue: Sheraton Grand Tbilisi Metechi Palace |
|---------------|--|

- 14:55 – 15:40 Briefing with the Delegation of Georgia to the Congress
- Ms Nino KAVTARADZE, Member of Rustavi City Council, Georgian Dream (L, EPP/CCE)
 - Mr Otar GRIGOLIA, Member of Tbilisi City Assembly, Georgian Dream, (R, SOC/V/DP)
 - Mr Levan ZHORZHOLIANI, Member of Tbilisi City Assembly, Georgian Dream; (R, SOC/V/DP)
 - Ms Sevdia UGREKHELIDZE, Member of Mtskheta City Council, United National Movement (R, EPP/CCE)
- Venue: Radisson Blu Tbilisi, Iveria Ballroom
- 15:45 – 16:05 Briefing with representatives of the United National Movement (UNM)
- Ms Tina BOKUCHAVA, Member of Georgian Parliament
 - Mr Irakli KAVTARADZE, Secretary of the International Relation of the NM Party

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms Sevdia UGREKHELIDZE, Member of Mtskheta City Council, United National Movement (R, EPP/CCE) Venue: Radisson Blu Tbilisi, Iveria Ballroom
16:10 – 16:40	Briefing with representatives from European Georgia <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr George NONIASHVILI, candidate to the Chugureti District (Tbilisi Municipality) Mr George KANDELAKI, Deputy Secretary General Ms Teona KUTALADZE, International Relation Coordinator Venue: Radisson Blu Tbilisi, Iveria Ballroom
16:45 – 17:15	Briefing with representatives/candidates from For Georgia <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr Levan DOLIDZE, Political adviser and head of proportional list for Tbilisi Mr Mikheil DAUSHVILI, Member of Parliament Venue: Radisson Blu Tbilisi, Iveria Ballroom
17:20 – 17:50	Briefing with representatives and candidates from Georgian Dream <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr Irakli KOBAKHIDZE, Chair of the Party Mr Kakha KALADZE, candidate in Tbilisi City and Head of the Georgian Delegation to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities Mr Shalva PAPUASHVILI, MP, Committee on Education, Parliament of Georgia Ms Mariam LASHKHI, Deputy Head of the Committee of International Relations of the Parliament of Georgia Venue: Radisson Blu Tbilisi, Iveria Ballroom
17:55 – 18:15	Debriefing Venue: Radisson Blu Tbilisi
18:00 - 19:30	Briefing for heads of delegation with Mr Tornike CHEISHVILI, Deputy Minister of Justice, Head of Inter-Agency Task Force for Free and Fair Elections Venue: Office of the Deputy Minister of Justice, 138 David Aghmashenebeli Alley, Tbilisi
20:00 – 22:00	Dinner
Saturday, 2 October 2021– ELECTION DAY	
07:00 – 20:00	Observation of the Election Day
23:00 approx.	Debriefing Venue: Radisson Blu Tbilisi
Sunday, 3 October 2021	
08:00 – 08:30	Online briefing for heads of delegations with OSCE/ODIHR Statistical Analyst, Venue: Bluejeans
09:00 – 9:30	Final meeting of heads of delegations to discuss the preliminary statement with OSCE/ODIHR and the Delegation of the European Parliament Venue: Sheraton Grand Tbilisi Metechi Palace
15:00 – 16:00	Press Conference to present preliminary conclusions with OSCE/ODIHR Venue: Sheraton Grand Tbilisi Metechi Palace
Various times	Departure of the Congress delegation

Monday, 4 October 2021

Various times Departure of the Congress delegation

DELEGATION

Congress members

Mr David ERAY (EPP/CCE, R), Switzerland, Head of Delegation
Ms Randi MONDORF (ILDG, R), Denmark, Deputy Head of Delegation
Ms Lale BEKTAS (SOC/G/PD, R), Turkey
Ms Carla DEJONGHE (ILDG, R), Belgium
Ms Jana FISCHEROVA (ECR, L), Czech Republic
Ms Samira HUSEYNOVA (SOC/G/PD, L), Azerbaijan
Mr György ILLES (ILDG, L), Hungary
Mr Matija KOVAC (EPP/CCE, R), Serbia
Mr Giuseppe MAGNI (ECR, L), Italy
Mr Vladimir PREBILIC (SOC/G/PD, L), Slovenia
Mr Kristoffer TAMSONS (EPP/CCE, R), Sweden
Mr Erion VELIAJ (SOC/G/PD, L), Albania
Mr Emin YERITSYAN (EPP/CCE, L), Armenia

Expert

Dr Pavel PSEJA, Member of the Group of Independent Experts (GIE)

Congress Secretariat

Ms Renate ZIKMUND, Head of Division, Local and Regional Election Observation
Mr Adam DRNOVSKY, Election Observation Officer
Ms Mathilde GIRARDI, Election Observation Officer
Ms Martine ROUDOLFF, Election Observation, Assistant

APPENDIX II

**Observation of local elections in Georgia – 2 October 2021 -
Deployment of teams on election day**

Team		Areas of Observation	Interpreter	Hotel
1	David ERAY Renate ZIKMUND	KASPI, GORI, KARELI, KHASURI	Mariam KHADJOMIA	Radisson Blu Tbilisi
2	Jana FISCHEROVA Carla DEJONGHE	MARNEULI, DMANISI, BOLNISI	Ia BOSTASHVILI	Radisson Blu Tbilisi
3	Pavel PSEJA Adam DRNOVSKY	KUTAISI, TERJOLA, ZESTAPONI	Tinatin KIRKITADZE	Hotel Terrace Kutaisi 10 26 May II Aly, KUTAISI Tel: +995 599 39 15 19 Hotel Terrace Kutaisi - Hotel in kutaisi (business.site)
4	Randi MONDORF Giuseppe MAGNI	MTSKHETA, TIANETI, DUSHETI	Gvantsa KVELASHVILI	Radisson Blu Tbilisi
5	Vladimir PREBILIC Erion VELIAJ	TELAVI, AKHMETA, KVARELI	Inga NAPETVARIDZE	Radisson Blu Tbilisi
6	Matija KOVAC György ILLES	NINOTSMINDA, AKHALKALAKI, TSALKA	Levan KIKNADZE	Hotel Gino Wellness Rabat Kharischirashvili str. #1 AKHALTSIKHE Tel: +995) 599 88 09 24 Email: info@gino.ge Contact – Gino Wellness

7	Kristoffer TAMSONS Mathilde GIRARDI	RUSTAVI, GARDABANI	Mariam KVERNADZE	Radisson Blu Tbilisi
8	Lale BEKTAS Martine ROUDOLFF	SAGAREJO, GURJAANI, SIGNAGHI	Nino ABRAMIDZE	Radisson Blu Tbilisi
9	Samira HUSEYNOVA Emin YERITSYAN	TBILISI	Natia LOMTADZE	Radisson Blu Tbilisi

APPENDIX III

PRESS RELEASE

Vote on 2 October was a missed opportunity for local democracy in Georgia, says Head of Congress delegation

STRASBOURG, FRANCE 4 OCTOBER 2021

The Congress concluded its mission to observe the local elections held on 2 October in Georgia. David ERAY (Switzerland, EPP/CCE, R), Head of the delegation, underlined the extremely polarized political environment in the country as well as an increase in verbal aggression, hate speech and fake news on social media during the campaign. "This polarisation had a paralyzing effect on local democracy which, in fact, has been taken hostage of the overall national political situation. Against this background, this poll was a missed opportunity for local democracy in Georgia", Mr Eray stated. The overall unlevel playing field, pressure on voters and vote-buying were further features of these elections which raised concern of the Congress delegation.

Further to the invitation by the Georgian authorities, the Congress carried out an election observation mission from 29 September to 3 October 2021 and observed the local elections held on 2 October as part of a joint international election observation mission together with the OSCE/ODIHR and the European Parliament. The Congress mission comprised 18 members representing 15 Council of Europe countries who observed elections in 9 regions of Georgia, visiting in total some 120 polling stations from the opening until the closing.

The Election Day was overall calm, orderly, transparent and well organised. Except for some inconsistencies, particularly regarding the set-up of polling booths and finger-inking, the Congress observers did not notice major shortcomings during the voting procedures. Some polling stations in urban areas, mostly in Tbilisi, were comparatively small considering the large number of commission members and domestic observers and thus over-crowded. This led also to some confusion about the different roles of election workers, notably during the counting. Some of the Congress observers also reported violations of the new regulation on the 100-meter-perimeter around polling stations.

Although new regulations were put in place to increase number of women on candidate lists by placing at least one in every three candidates of the opposite gender on the ballot, this legal provision proved insufficient as women were almost always placed as the third, sixth or ninth candidate, thus having much lower chances to get elected than their male counterparts. "In our opinion, this was against the spirit of the law", Mr Eray stated.

Prior to the Election Day, the Congress delegation held meetings in Tbilisi with various interlocutors, including representatives of the diplomatic corps, domestic and international NGOs, media representatives, the Central Elections Commission and with the Deputy Minister of Justice and Head of Inter-Agency Task Force for Free and Fair Elections, Mr Tornike Cheishvili. Meetings with representatives from different parties including GD, UNM, For Georgia and European Georgia rounded off the preparatory programme of the Congress. The Congress report will be presented at the next Monitoring Committee and adopted during the 42nd Congress Plenary in March 2022.