

საქართველოს ახალგაზრდა იურისტთა ასოციაცია GEORGIAN YOUNG LAWYERS' ASSOCIATION



NGOs respond to Georgian Dream's plans for election reform

On August 31, 2015 the Georgian Dream coalition [announced](#) that no fundamental changes to the electoral system were being planned prior to the 2016 parliamentary elections. Instead, the government plans to introduce two changes. Firstly, a new 50% threshold will be introduced to the majoritarian electoral system. This will mean that if in the first round of voting a candidate does not receive 50% of the vote, a second round run-off will be triggered. Secondly, majoritarian electoral district boundaries will be adjusted, in accordance with the ruling of the Constitutional Court of Georgia and the Council of Europe's 2002 Code of Good Practice.

The Georgian Dream also stated that it will present the Parliament with a package of constitutional amendments that will ensure the introduction of a fully proportional (multi-mandate constituency) system for all future parliamentary elections after 2016. This proposal was first announced by the Georgian Dream on June 5, 2015. We published our [analysis of it within days, which was that these reforms were insufficient](#).

We would like to reiterate that the proposed changes are insufficient for the formation of a fairer electoral environment for the next parliamentary elections in 2016. These elections will still be held under a mixed electoral system, which cannot ensure that votes are proportionally reflected in mandates.

We believe that the electoral system reform planned for 2020 should be expedited and implemented for the next parliamentary elections in 2016, our reasoning is outlined below. Provided there is political will, there is ample time to adopt the necessary legal changes.

First, the Georgian Dream coalition claims that by introducing the recently announced changes it is fulfilling its pre-election promise of establishing a fair electoral system. The coalition leaders, however, have commented that the mixed electoral system [is unfair](#) and adopting a fully proportional one would be a [better decision](#). This is further evidenced by the desire to hold the 2020 parliamentary elections under a proportional system and the initiation of relevant constitutional amendments. It is, therefore, unclear why the government is holding back on introducing these changes sooner.

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Second, converting the current single-mandate constituencies into multi-mandate ones will prove extremely difficult and will inevitably lead to mechanical merging of many electoral districts with very different geographical and historical characteristics as well as a serious weakening the representation for smaller territorial units. Since the majoritarian electoral system is to be scrapped for the 2020 elections, balancing of the majoritarian districts can be considered as an inefficient spending of resources.

Third, having a consensus among almost all stakeholders (political parties, civil society organizations, expert groups) that the Parliament should be elected under a fully proportional system is unprecedented for Georgian political history. Even though the Georgian Dream also shares this opinion, for some reason, it supports the introduction of this system only for the 2020 elections. Prolonging the reform process increases the chance for this consensus to weaken, and for the next Parliament to no longer support the reform.

Finally, the Georgian Dream coalition's decision to postpone the reform puts the country in a position where for the following four years it will have to put up with the existing system. It will also annually spend GEL 4 million of state funds for maintaining the 73 MP offices. Despite all stakeholders agreeing that the current majoritarian electoral system is problematic. The public awareness of MPs is very low: only 30% of respondents [interviewed](#) in 2015 know who represents their district in Parliament. Therefore, the Georgian Dream's claim that the reform will be opposed by majoritarian MPs suggests that they are deliberately maintaining an inefficient system that causes unreasonable spending of state resources.

We urge the Georgian Dream coalition to take into account the existing public consensus, to show political will, and to initiate constitutional amendments while there is still enough time so that the 2016 parliamentary elections are conducted under a fully proportional system.

Transparency International Georgia

International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED)

Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA)

Open Society Georgia Foundation

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