



The initiative to write off debts represents unprecedented case of alleged vote buying

The signatory organizations respond to the initiative announced by the Prime Minister of Georgia on November 19, according to which 600 000 voters will be written off debts. We believe that the initiative noted, which will be carried out by „Kartu Foundation, is supposedly an unprecedented case of vote buying and law enforcement agencies should express interest.

In particular, at the briefing held on November 19, the Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze announced that over half a million citizens will be written off debts. In accordance with the PM, it includes financial liabilities of 600 000 citizens towards banks, online credit organizations or different institutions, which, in total is approximately a billion and a half Georgian Lari. By his statement, this process will start on December 15 and come to the end on December 31: „ 600 000 citizens will surely be removed from the debtor registry by December 31 and meet the New Year without debts According to the Minister of Finance Ivane Machavariani, „Kartu

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Foundation will completely cover debts of estimated 600 000 citizens, who are in a so-called „ Black list. □□ This applies to individuals who have not be able to pay a loan for one year and the amount of principal loan is no more than 2 000 GEL.

The decision announced by the government contains signs of vote buying and is directed in favor of Salome Zurabishvili, the candidate supported by the ruling party and aims at winning the heart of voters before the second tour of the election. In accordance with the „Criminal Code of Georgia □□ „For election purposes, indirect or direct offering or promising of money, securities (including a financial instrument), other property, property rights, services or any other advantages, or knowingly accepting the above noted, or making a fraudulent, hypocritical or other kind of deals in order to avoid the restrictions imposed by law □ envisages imprisonment for up to three years or the fine. □□□□ is noteworthy that such a scale of allege vote buying is unprecedented for Georgia. The initiative, considering its scale, will undoubtedly affect the results of the election.

It is true that Bidzina Ivanishvili, who is the chairman of the party „Georgian Dream, □□ is not mentioned in the registration documents of the „Kartu Group □□□ however, for the society, this organization is associated with him and his family. Besides, the chairperson of the board of „Kartu,, Foundation directly states that the decision noted is taken by Bidzina Ivanishvili. [1] Consequently, the announcement made by the representatives of the government on the repayment of such a scale and amount of financial loan by the „Kartu Group □□ before the second round of the elections, will be naturally associated with Bidzina Ivanishvili and his campaigning in favor of Salome Zurabishvili. In addition, it is vogue and untransparent, what kind of negotiations have been held with the banking sector and various financial institutions regarding the debts write-off. The deal to purchase 1.5 billion financial liabilities from commercial banks for 100 million, might rise additional doubts concerning the banking and financial businesses participation in the state`s dishonest influences. The fact is that the agreement would be difficult to achieve without the state involvement and the question is whether would it be possible at all having another person instead of Ivanishvili-related „Kartu” Foundation.

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We believe that this initiative might stand for scaled and unprecedented violation of the legislation. In addition, it is also directed by narrow party-related and political interests, which negatively affect not only the electoral environment, but also the democratic development of the country. The use of hard social conditions of voters by the political party for election purpose, is unacceptable and demonstrates the low political culture.

Correspondingly, we call on:

- **The government** refrain from adopting populist and narrow political decisions and draw out a fundamental approach to overcome the poverty of citizens instead of manipulating with the financial problems of voters;
- **All political parties** to realize their role and responsibility and refrain from making such populist statements;
- **The Georgian Prosecutor`s Office** to investigate the fact timely and objectively and respond with relevant legal action.

Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA)

Transparency International Georgia

International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED)