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# Free, Fair and Equal Electoral-Political 2022-2025 Cycle in Georgia

**NEWSLETTER №44**  
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# INTRODUCTION

Since August 2019, the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) has been implementing the project “Free, Fair and Equal Election” throughout Georgia, covering the electoral political cycle from 2022 to 2025. One of the project's goals is to promote the improvement of the election environment through monitoring and evidence-based advocacy. To achieve this, the organization will monitor ongoing policy processes and develop recommendations that will be communicated to the public and presented to decision-makers. Currently, we are presenting Newsletter #44, which describes the events of May that have had an impact on the political environment.

## 1. MID-TERM AND EXTRAORDINARY ELECTIONS OF THE GEORGIAN PARLIAMENT AND CITY COUNCILS AND MAYORS

On May 5, the relevant district election commissions summarized the results of the mid-term and mayoral elections of April 29, 2023.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, the Central Election Commission (CEC) published the summary of the parliamentary mid-term elections on May 7.<sup>2</sup>

According to the CEC, new technologies have won the approval of the voters. According to them, using technology, the election administration presented the initial preliminary results within an hour and a half after the end of voting.<sup>3</sup>

On April 29, the citizens of Georgia participated in the interim/extraordinary elections held in 10 municipalities. Mayoral elections were held in two municipalities, while majority council members were elected in five municipalities, and majority deputies were elected in three municipalities.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. AMENDMENTS TO THE ELECTION CODE

On May 8, a legislative initiative<sup>5</sup> was registered in the Parliament of Georgia, according to which the Parliament of Georgia will elect the Chairman and seven members of the Central Election Commission (CEC), instead of the President. The Speaker of the Parliament will make the nomination and the number of votes required for election will be reduced to a simple majority instead of the current 2/3.<sup>6</sup>

**According to GYLA, the current rule for staffing the CEC is based on the desire of the Charles Michel Agreement. It involves an agreement between the parliamentary majority and the opposition regarding the nomination of the CEC chairman and members. However, with the proposed changes, the requirement for negotiations between parties to reach a consensus will be eliminated, and the majority will have the authority to appoint the CEC unilaterally.<sup>7</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> “The CEC summarized the final results of the mid-term elections of the Parliament of Georgia” CEC website, available at: <https://bit.ly/3qIYPLm>, updated: 20.06.2023.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Elections of the Parliament of Georgia were held in Poti-Senaki-Khobi majority district; Mid-term elections of the City Council was taken place in Gurjaani, Tianeti, Akhaltsikhe, Tkibuli, Kutaisi districts; And the extraordinary elections of the mayor in Tsageri and Terjola District.

“The Central Election Commission published the results of the April 29 interim/extraordinary elections”, information portal „civil.ge”, May 1, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/539780> updated: 20.06.2023.

<sup>5</sup> Legislative initiative “On Amendments to the Organic Law of Georgia “Election Code of Georgia”, website of the Parliament of Georgia, available at: <https://info.parliament.ge/#law-drafting/26338>, updated: 20.06.2023.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> “Georgian Dream” continues to adjust the legislation to party interests and reduces the independence of the CEC with the changes in the CEC staffing rules”, website of GYLA, May 8, 2023, available at: <https://bit.ly/3Xk8QuH>, updated: 20.06.2023.

According to GYLA, the significant reduction of the President’s role in staffing the CEC, as outlined in the existing legislation, raises additional legitimate questions from the point of view of its compatibility with the Constitution.<sup>8</sup>

The organization believes that the ‘Georgian Dream’ is refusing to strengthen democratic institutions by disregarding the existing rules for staffing the CEC. Consequently, GYLA has called upon the Parliament of Georgia to refrain from approving the proposed draft law and to consider the recommendations of strategic partners regarding the necessity of taking effective measures to ensure the independence of the election administration.<sup>9</sup> The Parliament of Georgia supported the adoption of the draft law.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. RESULTS OF THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE (NDI) SURVEY

On May 3, NDI published the results of a public opinion survey.<sup>11</sup> According to the survey, Georgian citizens strongly support close political (54%) and economic (52%) cooperation with the European Union. However, despite such aspirations, according to the results of the same survey, the majority of the population believes that the government of Georgia is not doing enough for the country’s EU membership.<sup>12</sup> According to 64% of the respondents, there is no political party in Georgia that expresses its interests.<sup>13</sup> “Georgian Dream” is the most acceptable party for 17%; “United National Movement” for 5%, and 6% named other parties.<sup>14</sup>

51% of respondents say that they do not trust any Georgian TV channel.<sup>15</sup> 18% declares their trust to the pro-government television “Imedi”; 8% – to the opposition “Mtavari channel”; 5% – “Rustavi 2”; 3% – “TV Pirveli”; 3% – “public broadcaster”; 6% – other televisions.<sup>16</sup>

### 4. RELATIONS BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND GEORGIA

#### 4.1. “Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe” (ALDE) Congress resolution supporting the integration of Georgia into the EU and NATO

On May 28, ALDE adopted a resolution supporting the integration of Georgia into the EU and NATO.<sup>17</sup> With this resolution, the Congress affirms its unwavering support for Georgia’s aspirations to become a member of the European Union and NATO. It also expresses strong support for granting Georgia the status of a candidate country for the European Union upon fulfilling the 12 priorities set by the European Commission.<sup>18</sup>

#### 4.2. Statements of the Prime Minister of Georgia, the President of Georgia and the Presidents of the European Council regarding “Europe Days”

On May 6, the Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Gharibashvili, speaking at the opening ceremony of the event dedicated to “Europe Day”, said that he believes that “Georgia will become a full-fledged member of the big

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> “On Amendments to the Organic Law of Georgia, “Georgian Election Code”, legislative initiative, website of the Parliament of Georgia.

<sup>11</sup> Public mind set in Georgia, March 2023 Telephone Survey Results, website of NDI, May 2023, available at: <https://bit.ly/444PbkI>, updated: 20.06.2023.

<sup>12</sup> “Public Attitudes in NDI’s March Survey”, news portal Civil.ge, May 3, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/540319>, updated: 20.06.2023.

Public mind set in Georgia, results of a March 2023 telephone survey, website of NDI.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> “The ALDE Congress adopted a resolution supporting Georgia’s integration into the European Union and NATO”, information portal “Civil.ge”, May 28, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/544956>, updated: 20.06.2023.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

European family and will enter Europe with its own traditions”.<sup>19</sup> On May 9, in connection with Europe Day, the President of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili and the President of the European Council Charles Michel addressed the Georgian people at an event held near the Atoneli Presidential Palace.<sup>20</sup> At the beginning of the address to the Georgian people, the President of Georgia emphasized that beyond the support and assistance of the partners on the path of the country’s European integration, Georgia has to do the rest.<sup>21</sup> The President of the European Council, Charles Michel, congratulated the citizens of Georgia on the Europe Day in a video message and stated that the Georgian people have made a clear choice, which is related to European values.<sup>22</sup>

### **4.3. Diplomats’ visits to Georgia**

On May 3, the Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia, Shalva Papuashvili, met with the members of the German Bundestag’s European Union Affairs Committee, who were visiting Tbilisi.<sup>23</sup> According to the press service of the Parliament of Georgia, the participants of the meeting focused on the fulfillment of the 12 priorities given by the European Commission for obtaining the status of a candidate country for EU membership.<sup>24</sup>

On May 14-15, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, Lars Lokke Lasrumen, visited Georgia.<sup>25</sup> He met Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili, Minister of Foreign Affairs Ilia Darchiashvili and Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Economy Levan Davitashvili.<sup>26</sup> According to the diplomat, Denmark supports European aspirations of Georgia.<sup>27</sup>

On May 3, NATO Assistant Secretary General for Contemporary Security Challenges James Appathurai was in Georgia.<sup>28</sup> He held a press conference to discuss the prospect of Georgia joining NATO, where he emphasized the importance of maintaining close cooperation between democratic countries against the background of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.<sup>29</sup> James Appathurai noted that Georgia is an important ally of NATO member states and stressed the need for closer cooperation to ensure stability.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, Appathurai also spoke about the need to continue reforms in Georgia, especially in terms of reducing political polarization, and called for progress in this field before the next NATO summit.<sup>31</sup>

### **4.4. “Georgian Dream” left the Party of European Socialists (PES)**

On April 28, representatives of various political parties and organizations united in the Party of European Socialists gathered online and, among other issues, discussed the situation surrounding the party’s observer member, “Georgian Dream”.<sup>32</sup> The issue related to the observer membership of “Georgian Dream” was previously raised

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<sup>19</sup> “Prime Minister: I believe that Georgia will enter Europe with its own traditions”, information portal “Civil.ge”, May 6, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/541081>, updated: 20.06.2023.

<sup>20</sup> “Presidents of Georgia and the European Council congratulated the Georgian people on Europe Day”, information portal „Civil.ge”, May 10, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/541501>, updated: 20.06.2023.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> “Shalva Papuashvili met with the representatives of the Bundestag delegation”, information portal “Civil.ge”, May 3, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/540508>, updated: 20.06.2023.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> “The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Denmark visits Georgia”, information portal “Civil.ge”, May 15, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/542388>, updated: 20.06.2023.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> “James Appathurai visits Georgia”, information portal “Civil.ge”, May 3 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/540572>, updated: 20.06.2023.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> “The Party of European Socialists is worried about the convergence of the “Dream” with the Conservative Conference”, information portal „civil.ge”, April 29, 2023, available at: information portal „civil.ge”, May 1, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/539577>, updated: 20.06.2023.

by PES President Stefan Löfven at the meeting held in March, and it is planned to be discussed and revised at the next meeting of the chairmanship in June 2023.<sup>33</sup>

On May 11, the chairman of “Georgian Dream” Irakli Kobakhidze announced that “Georgian Dream” is leaving the status of an observer member of “European Socialist Party”.<sup>34</sup> Irakli Kobakhidze named the ideological transformation of the Socialist Party of Europe as the reason for the decision of the ruling party.<sup>35</sup>

#### 4.5. President’s visit to Brussels

On May 30-31, the President of Georgia, Salome Zourabichvili, paid a working visit to Brussels, where she met the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and the President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola. On May 31, Salome Zourabichvili addressed the European Parliament with a speech.<sup>36</sup> According to the administration of the President of Georgia, among other issues the parties discussed, the European future of Georgia, the 12 priorities of the European Commission and the challenges in the direction of the implementation of reforms.<sup>37</sup> During her speech, the President noted that Georgians are at a historical moment, because they want Georgia to return to its European family after centuries of striving.<sup>38</sup> The president also stated that she will do everything to make this happen not only because it is stipulated by the constitution, but because of “moral conviction”.<sup>39</sup>

## 5. DONATIONS OF POLITICAL PARTIES

According to the newsletter published by the non-governmental organization “Transparency International-Georgia” (TIG) on May 15, in the first quarter of 2023 (January-March), political parties received a total of GEL 640,569 in donations, of which almost half - GEL 300,000 was received by “Georgian Dream”.<sup>40</sup> With GEL 201,000, “Lelo for Georgia” is in second place in terms of political donations. Next come: “European Georgia” – GEL 84,299; “Conservative Movement” - with GEL 21,724 and “United National Movement” with GEL 7,650.<sup>41</sup>

## 6. THE CASE OF MIKHEIL SAAKASHVILI

At a briefing held on May 12, the Minister of Justice of Georgia, Rati Bregadze, stated that the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg rejected the request for a temporary measure to transfer the detained ex-president of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili, to Warsaw, the capital of Poland, for medical treatment. Furthermore, there was no directive for the state to transfer him to another treatment facility within the country.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> “Georgian Dream leaves the European Socialist Party due to ideological incompatibility”, information portal “civil.ge”, May 11, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/541808>, updated: 20.06.2023.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> “Salome Zourabichvili is visiting Brussels”, information portal „civil.ge”, May 30, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/545550>, updated: 20.06.2023.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> “The President in the European Parliament: “Our common goal will be to not miss a second chance”, information portal “civil.ge”, May 31, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/545887>, updated: 20.06.2023.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> “Almost half of the political donation was received by “Georgian Dream” again”, information portal „civil.ge”, May 15, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/542317>, updated: 20.06.2023.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> “Rati Bregadze: Strasbourg did not meet the request to transfer Saakashvili to Warsaw for medical treatment”, information portal „civil.ge”, May 12, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/542162>, updated: 20.06.2023.

During the press conference held after the Justice Minister's briefing, Shota Tutberidze, the lawyer of Mikheil Saakashvili, stated that this is not the final decision of the Strasbourg court. Rather, it is a procedural decision concerning Saakashvili's transfer prior to the consideration of the so-called temporary measure claim.<sup>43</sup>

The President of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili also responded to the court's decision and said that it is important that the European Court of Human Rights did not agree to the urgent transfer of the former president to a foreign medical facility.<sup>44</sup> According to the President, it is important that such a decision was not taken that would harm the reputation of Georgia.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.