



## The General Auditor's decision creates suspicions of political motive

On October 2, it was reported that the new General Auditor, Irakli Mekvabishvili dismissed two deputy general auditors, Nino Lomjaria and Devi Vepkhvadze. The only deputy general auditor who kept his office is Nodar Javakhishvili. He used to serve as the Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure, and as the General Director of Bidzina Ivanishvili's own bank Cartu.

The State Audit Office (SAO) has always drawn much of civil society's attention because of its functions, especially during an election period. In view of the nature its activities, it is important that the SAO remains independent and impartial. This is largely ensured by independence of the General Auditor and his deputies from political party influences.

Naturally, the new General Auditor has the power to replace Deputy General Auditors

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with candidates of his choosing but the fact that politically neutral deputies were dismissed while the official affiliated with the ruling party was able to keep his office creates suspicions that the decision is politically motivated. One of the deputies dismissed by the new General Auditor is Nino Lomjaria, who is known to be a principled, independent, impartial, highly qualified and experienced individual.

These suspicions are further intensified by the ongoing election campaign, when it is especially important that the SAO remain impartial while monitoring political party financing. Nino Lomjaria was in charge of this direction. Considering the specific nature of monitoring political party financing, it remains unclear as to why there was a need to dismiss her during the pre-election period, a few weeks before the election, when a thorough monitoring of political party donations and campaign expenditures is especially important.

**We urge the General Auditor to remain unbiased in his work and refrain from making any decisions that will create suspicions about his political motive and bias, which will ultimately be detrimental to the reputation of the State Audit Office as an independent institution and will undermine public trust towards the Office.**

International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy

Open Society – Georgia Foundation

Transparency International Georgia

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Article 42 of the Constitution

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