

INTERIM REPORT
30 August – 19 September 2016

23 September 2016

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- In the 8 October elections, voters will elect 150 members of parliament – 77 under a closed party list proportional system and 73 by a majoritarian vote in single-mandate constituencies. There is a five per cent threshold to qualify for proportional seat allocation and majoritarian candidates must receive more than 50 per cent of valid votes cast to be elected or a second round is required.
- Amendments to the Election Code in 2015 resulted in the drawing of new constituency boundaries, aiming to address previous recommendations of the OSCE/ODIHR, and an increase in the percentage of votes needed to be elected in majoritarian contests. Other amendments, introduced as recently as June 2016, are mainly technical, and eased procedures for voters without an officially registered address or valid identification documents.
- Elections are administered by a three-tiered election administration, the Central Election Commission (CEC), 73 District Election Commissions (DECs) and 3,565 Precinct Election Commissions (PECs). CEC sessions are open to observers.
- Citizens over the age of 18 years, except prisoners sentenced to more than five years imprisonment, have the right to vote. Over 3.5 million voters are registered. Authorities made efforts to improve the accuracy of voter lists through various means.
- Voters will have the choice among 25 parties and blocs on the proportional ballot and 854 candidates in majoritarian contests, 57 of whom are nominated by voter initiative groups. Eighteen political parties were refused registration, the registration of an additional 8 parties was later cancelled and 2 registrations were annulled. Four parties qualified for public funding for meeting the gender quota on their lists. There are 147 female majoritarian candidates.
- Since the start of the campaign on 8 June, campaign activities were limited and small-scale; a few incidents of skirmishes between campaign staff and damage to party offices and campaign materials have been reported. The Georgian Dream and the United National Movement are thus far the most visible parties. Regular verbal confrontations between representatives of the two parties have been reported in the media.
- There are requirements for regular financial reporting in the pre-election period and the State Audit Office oversees compliance with party and campaign finance regulations and investigates potential irregularities. Recent amendments partially address a number of previous Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) recommendations.
- Media legislation provides for the freedom of media, but incidents related to some media outlets persist. Recent amendments to the Election Code reduced the amount of free airtime granted to qualified subjects on public and private broadcasters, a point of concern for a number of

political parties. The OSCE/ODIHR EOM quantitative and qualitative monitoring of primetime coverage on six TV channels commenced on 5 September.

- A number of national minority representatives have been nominated on party lists and for majoritarian contests mainly in minority populated regions. Voter lists, ballots, protocols, and voter information are translated into minority languages.
- The Election Code provides for observation of the entire electoral process by citizen and international organizations, as well as representatives of election contestants. As of 19 September, the CEC had registered 63 citizen and 30 international observer organizations.
- To date, the election commissions and the courts have received 115 complaints mainly regarding PEC appointments, election commissions' reactions to alleged election violations, and alleged violations of campaign rules. Seven complaints were fully or partially satisfied.

II. INTRODUCTION

Following a timely invitation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, and in accordance with its mandate, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) deployed an Election Observation Mission (EOM) on 30 August. The EOM, headed by Ambassador Alexandre Keltchewsky, consists of a 12-member core team based in Tbilisi and 26 long-term observers deployed throughout the country from 7 September. Mission members are drawn from 21 OSCE participating States. The OSCE/ODIHR has requested participating States to second 350 short-term observers to observe election day procedures.

III. BACKGROUND

The October 2016 parliamentary elections are the first elections to be held under the semi-presidential constitutional structure introduced after the 2012 parliamentary elections, which were Georgia's first peaceful transfer of power since independence. The ruling coalition, the Georgian Dream (GD), won 85 of 150 seats and the largest opposition group, the United National Movement (UNM), 65 seats. Recent political developments fragmented the ruling coalition and parliamentary parties.¹ The GD and its coalition partners will take part in the upcoming elections separately.

Before these elections, the longstanding and fundamental change of the electoral system from mixed to fully proportional was in the process of adoption. However, despite the consensus reached among ruling coalition members, the opposition and civil society on the abolishment of the majoritarian system, the GD postponed the adoption of reforms until after the 2016 elections.²

The elections are taking place in an environment influenced by the country's poor economic performance along with the public disillusionment with the political elite. Signed in June 2014, the Association Agreement with the European Union also impacts the context of elections and raised discussions over Georgia's geopolitical orientation. The political tension between the GD and the

¹ Since the 2012 parliamentary elections, the Free Democrats (FD), National Forum (NF) and the Republican Party (RP) left the GD coalition; four members left the GD party to sit as independents. Currently, the GD is supported by 12 independent majoritarian candidates, the Industry Will Save Georgia and Conservative Party with six members each. Four members from the UNM founded a new party – New Political Centre Girchi.

² In May, the Human Rights Training and Monitoring Center challenged the constitutionality of the electoral system. The claim was accepted by Constitutional Court, but the decision was taken to consider the case after the elections.

UNM, including a violent confrontation in Kortsikheli during the May 2016 local by-election, also negatively affects the atmosphere for elections.

IV. ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The 150 members of parliament (MPs) are elected for four-year terms under a mixed electoral system. Of these, 77 members are elected under a closed party list proportional system in one nationwide constituency and 73 are elected in single-member constituencies through a majoritarian system. Parties and blocs must surpass a five per cent threshold of valid votes cast to qualify for proportional seat allocation. In majoritarian contests, candidates must receive more than 50 per cent of valid votes cast to be elected (an increase from 30 per cent following amendments in December 2015). If no candidate receives the required number of votes, a runoff is held no later than 25 days after the first round between the two candidates who received the highest number of votes.

The elections are primarily regulated by the 1995 Constitution, the 2011 Election Code, the 1997 Law on Political Unions of Citizens, as well as the Criminal Code, the Administrative Offences Code, the Administrative Code, the 2008 Law on the State Audit Office, the 2004 Law on Broadcasting, and decrees and ordinances of the Central Election Commission (CEC).³

The Election Code was significantly amended since the last parliamentary elections. At the end of 2015, it was amended to redraw the boundaries of single-mandate constituencies aiming to respect the principle of equal suffrage and address previous recommendations of the OSCE/ODIHR.⁴ The amendments prescribe the redrawing of constituencies in a two-stage process, defined the boundaries for 43 of 73 single-member constituencies and mandated the CEC to delimitate the remaining 30 constituencies in municipalities where more than one election district should be created.

A constitutional challenge of the amendment on the new delimitation procedures was brought on 1 June by 42 MPs but was rejected on 20 July by the Constitutional Court.⁵ The court also did not find that tasking the CEC to define the boundaries of the 30 single-mandate constituencies, without setting clear criteria, was fraught with risk of gerrymandering as complainants argued.

Other amendments, as recently as June 2016, were mainly based on CEC proposals. Among the most important changes are the transitional provisions that ease conditions for some categories of voters to be registered at their factual or previously registered address. Other amendments defined the number of voters necessary to register an initiative group, decreased the amount of free airtime on public and private broadcasters, and allowed police, in exceptional cases to prevent violence, to be present near polling stations without a request from the Precinct Election Commission (PEC) chairperson.

In May, the Law on Political Unions of Citizens was amended and new provisions came into force on 20 June, requiring parties to update their data with the Public Register within 10 days after changes take place, which affected the registration status of several parties.⁶

³ As of 19 September, the CEC adopted 37 decrees and 71 ordinances. Two ordinances were appealed to the court, of which one was satisfied, and the other was not, and three decrees were appealed, none were satisfied.

⁴ The number of voters in each election district now varies from 41,598 in the smallest to 54,168 in the largest. The largest deviation in numbers of voters from the average size is currently 25.4 per cent.

⁵ The Court stated that, "arguments provided by the applicants and analysis of the boundaries of electoral districts do not show instance of abuse of electoral geography."

⁶ The registration of the Centrists Party was annulled on 16 August, and of the Kvaratskhelia-Socialists on 31 August based on information received from Public Registry who stated that, based on information updated by the parties, the applications for registration with the CEC were not signed by legitimate heads of the parties.

V. ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

Elections are managed by a three-tiered election administration – the CEC, 73 District Elections Commissions (DECs) and 3,565 PECs.⁷ For these elections, 53 DECs will fully exercise their functions prescribed by law, while 20 DECs will act as Subsidiary District Election Commissions (SDECs) with limited functions mainly providing support to the other DECs.⁸ Special provisions are in place to facilitate the participation of persons with disabilities – barrier-free environments have been created in 1,115 polling stations and each polling station will have magnifying sheets and tactile frames. A CEC voter information campaign with video messages translated into minority and sign languages is ongoing.

All election commissions are composed of 13 members, 7 of whom are nominated by the political parties that qualify for public funding.⁹ At the CEC level, the remaining five members are appointed by the parliament upon the nomination of the president with separate procedures for the selection of the Chairperson.¹⁰ Three CEC members are women, including the chairperson. Women comprise approximately 62 per cent of DEC and 69 per cent of PEC members.¹¹ CEC sessions are open for observers and all decrees, ordinances, and complaints are posted on its website.

As of now, OSCE/ODIHR EOM stakeholders express confidence in the CEC's professionalism and performance, however, in the pre-election period, numerous allegations were made, mainly about DECs not acting impartially when appointing lower-level commission members. The election officials made efforts to increase the transparency of PEC recruitment, for example, by publishing statistics on the previous experience of PEC members, including those previously appointed by parties.

The CEC supervises the Center of Electoral Systems Development, Reforms and Trainings.¹² The Center conducted the first stages of its training programme for DEC and PEC members, a number of which were observed by the OSCE/ODIHR EOM. The Center also organized trainings on election-related topics for various stakeholders, such as media representatives, local administration officials, potential female candidates, representatives of electoral contestants, and citizen observers.

VI. VOTER REGISTRATION

Citizens over 18 years of age have the right to vote, except for prisoners sentenced to more than five years imprisonment. In March 2015, persons without legal capacity were granted the right to vote.¹³ Georgia has a passive voter registration system. The CEC is responsible to compile voter lists (VLs)

⁷ There will be 57 additional precincts established for out-of-country voting in 42 countries.

⁸ SDECs will mainly provide logistical, administrative and information support to the DECs. There will be no tabulation of results at the SDEC level.

⁹ The seven political parties that received the highest amount of state funding include the UNM, GD, Conservative Party (CP), RP, FD, Industry Will Save Georgia and NF.

¹⁰ The president nominates three candidates and then the CEC members appointed by political parties (with exception of the member appointed by the party with the best results in the previous parliamentary elections) elect the chairperson. If the CEC members fail to elect the chairperson within the prescribed deadline, parliament has seven days to elect him or her.

¹¹ According to the CEC update as of 31 August.

¹² This is a legal entity responsible for the trainings and professional development of election officials.

¹³ Following Constitutional Court Decision #2/4/532,533 of 8 October 2014 on citizens recognized incapable.

based on data provided by the Public Service Development Agency (PSDA) within the Ministry of Justice and other relevant authorities.¹⁴

Preliminary VLs include 3,577,375 voters. VLs were posted in polling stations from 8 September for public scrutiny with additions and corrections permitted until 22 September. In addition, options for verifying data on VLs are provided on the CEC website and a special application was introduced for voters to check VLs through 7,000 payment terminals around the country.

The authorities made efforts to increase the accuracy of the VLs. The PSDA is introducing biometric data in the state registry.¹⁵ To remove inconsistencies in the VLs, door-to-door verifications were conducted and facial recognition software is being used to remove duplicate records.

Election Code amendments in force from 12 July gave voters without an officially registered address or valid documents the opportunity to register and be inserted in the VL according to the address of their previous or factual residence by 1 August.¹⁶ Considering the short period, the CEC adopted a special decree extending the period for registration for these categories of voters until the last day for amendments to the VL, 22 September. The CEC informed the OSCE/ODIHR EOM that 61,395 voters who had been previously removed from VLs are now re-included following these changes.

VII. CANDIDATE REGISTRATION

Any citizen of Georgia who has the right to vote, has attained the age of 21, and speaks Georgian may be elected.¹⁷ Citizens who have not resided in Georgia for the last two years and who did not register during this time with a consulate abroad, or those deemed a drug addict or user may not be elected. Certain public officials are required to resign from their positions to be eligible to stand for office.

Out of 64 political parties/blocs who applied for registration for the proportional race, the CEC registered 25 election subjects with 19 parties running separately, and 17 parties running in 6 blocs. Eighteen parties were refused registration, the registration of eight additional parties was cancelled mainly for failure to submit the required documentation and two were annulled.¹⁸ Registered election subjects had until 8 September to submit their party lists. Parties eligible for public funding receive an additional 30 per cent of funding if at least 30 per cent of candidates of the less represented gender are included among every 10 candidates of their respective list. Out of nine eligible subjects, three parties met this requirement.¹⁹ There are 1,330 registered female candidates for the proportional and 147 for the majoritarian contests.

For majoritarian seats, candidates can be nominated by parties, blocs or run independently if nominated by an initiative group of at least five voters. For these elections, 57 candidates were nominated by

¹⁴ Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Corrections and Legal Assistance, Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons, local self-government bodies and the Supreme Court.

¹⁵ Currently, the PSDA has biometric data for some 2,400,000 voters.

¹⁶ Article 185¹² of the Election Code entered into force in 12 July.

¹⁷ The Georgian Young Lawyers' Association' submitted a complaint to DEC #81 of Kobuleti, appealed later to the CEC and Tbilisi City Court stating that the DEC violated legislation by registering a candidate who does not speak Georgian. The Court ruled that the law does not prescribe a mechanism for verifying language skills. Therefore the DEC decision to register the candidate was upheld.

¹⁸ The Centrist and Kvaratskhelia – Socialists party registration was annulled (*See Legal Framework section*). The registration of Topadze – Industrials, Our Homeland was canceled by the CEC, but that decision was later overturned by the Tbilisi City Court, and the party's registration restored and party list accepted.

¹⁹ Political parties who met this requirement are Nino Burjanadze - Democratic Movement (DM), Labour Party of Georgia (LP), Alliance Patriots of Georgia (APG) and the FD.

initiative groups and were registered by the respective DEC. Twenty-seven initiative groups had their registration canceled for not submitting the necessary documentation or voluntarily withdrew. In total there are 854 majoritarian candidates registered for these elections.

VIII. CAMPAIGN AND CAMPAIGN FINANCE

The official election campaign period started on 8 June upon the calling of the elections. The law obliges local authorities to provide equal conditions for all contestants, including access to campaign premises and advertising space. It also includes provisions on the misuse of administrative resources and prohibits campaigning by public officials. Campaigning on election day is not prohibited except in the media and polling stations.

In the observed period, campaign activities have been limited and mainly conducted through rallies, small community meetings and door-to-door canvassing. Campaign advertisements such as billboards and candidate posters are visible throughout the country, particularly in large cities. The GD and UNM are the most active and visible among the contestants. Campaign messages mainly focused on socio-economic issues, the development of infrastructure, agriculture and Euro-Atlantic integration.

The tone of the campaign is confrontational, with both the UNM and GD accusing the other of exacerbating the confrontational situation in the electoral process.²⁰ A number of incidents such as skirmishes between campaign staff, damage to party offices and campaign materials have been reported to the OSCE/ODIHR EOM and covered in the media.²¹ Although many investigations have been opened, several opposition parties expressed a deep mistrust in law enforcement institutions and the State Security Service. The OSCE/ODIHR EOM has received a number of allegations regarding the misuse of administrative resource, pressure on public employees, including requirements to attend campaign events and intimidation of campaign staff.

Amendments to the legal framework regulating party and campaign finance were adopted in August 2013, March 2014 and most recently in June 2016. They lower sanctions for violations of campaign finance rules, adjust types of permitted donations, introduce regulations related to candidates nominated by initiative groups and allocate public funds to cover TV advertising expenses for qualified election subjects.²² However, recommendations from the Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption (GRECO), such as the establishment of a more uniform legal framework, prevention of the misuse of all types of administrative resources and the introduction of proportionate and dissuasive sanctions for all infringements have only been partially addressed.²³

Election subjects may finance their electoral campaigns from private donations, loans and public funds. The law provides ceilings for donations and expenditures. The total amount of annual expenditures by

²⁰ On 14 September, the Prime Minister and chairman of the GD accused the UNM of radicalizing the situation in the country. On the same day, the executive secretary of the UNM accused GD of continuing intimidation and pressure on UNM party members.

²¹ For example, on 11 August, in Dedoplistskaro, the UNM's office was damaged; on 2 September, in Tbilisi, a UNM candidate's office was raided; on 11 September, in Kharagauli, a State for People party rally was disrupted; on 13 September, a UNM candidate's billboard in Racha Lechkhumi-Svaneti was set on fire; on 16 September, in Gamarjveba village, a UNM campaign activist was attacked and an investigation has been opened; on September 19, in Saburtalo, a GD office was broken into by three individuals.

²² There are 11 qualified subjects who passed the three per cent threshold in the last municipal and parliamentary elections and are entitled for public funding: GD, CP, Industry Will Save Georgia, RP, FD, NF, UNM, Christian-Conservative Party of Georgia, DM, Alliance Patriots of Georgia (APG), and LP.

²³ See the 2015 [GRECO Second Compliance Report on Georgia](#).

the party or bloc may not exceed 0.1 per cent of the gross domestic product of the previous year.²⁴ The total amount of private donations may not exceed GEL 60,000 (approximately EUR 27,000) and for legal entities GEL 120,000 (EUR 53,500) annually.

The State Audit Office (SAO) is mandated to exercise party and campaign finance oversight and respond to violations. The 2013 amendments reduced the authority of SAO in that it now requires a court decision in order to impose sanctions or request information on the origins of funds and property donated to election subjects. All election subjects must submit financial reports every three weeks from the date of their registration and report on income within five days of receipt. As of 19 September, the OSCE/ODIHR EOM was informed that 9 out of 57 independent candidates and 3 out of 25 registered parties/blocs had not submitted their reports within the deadlines. In addition, the SAO interviewed 79 donors to verify contributions and sought court decisions against 7 for unlawful donations.²⁵ Further, the SAO reviewed 27 complaints alleging financial election-related violations. From 8 June to 31 August, the total amount of donations was GEL 13,099,169 (approximately EUR 5,055,240) from 1,019 donors to 10 parties.²⁶

IX. MEDIA

The primary source of information is television. Print media have limited circulation, while the role online media is growing. While presenting a diversity of views, media outlets, especially broadcast media, are often perceived as polarized along political lines.

While media legislation provides for freedom of the media, in the two last years a case sparked concerns about it.²⁷ The court actions in the case against the current owners of *Rustavi 2* have been cited by several local civil society and international organizations as an attempt to restrict media freedom. While the case is open, the channel is able to freely cover the pre-election period.

Amendments reduced the amount of free airtime granted to qualified subjects on both public and private broadcasters, a point of concern for some political parties.²⁸ The Election Code obliges the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) and *Adjara TV* to allocate time also to all non-qualified electoral contestants.²⁹ Paid advertising is allowed without an expenditure ceiling for parties, while broadcasters shall publish their rates on a weekly basis and offer equal conditions to all contestants. Qualified subjects are also entitled to receive additional public funds to cover TV advertising costs. Pre-election

²⁴ Or GEL 13, 970,000. 1 EUR equals approx. 2.5 Georgian Lari (GEL).

²⁵ Four donors contributed to Paata Burchuladze - State for People (SP), 2 to the GD and 1 to APG.

²⁶ For the reporting period, the GD received GEL 8,746,410; SP – GEL 262,668,9; APG – GEL 626,948; UNM –GEL 566,615; FD – GEL 311,350; DM – GEL 107,996; Topadze – Industrials, Our Homeland – GEL 71,700; RP – GEL 21,840; NF – GEL 12,020; LP – GEL 7,600. Out of 1,019 donors, 23 are legal entities.

²⁷ In a court case over the ownership of *Rustavi 2*, a private TV channel with the highest audience shares in the country, on 4 August 2015, one of the former owners of the channel filed a lawsuit against it in the Tbilisi City Court to regain the ownership, claiming he was forced to sell it. On 10 June, the Tbilisi Court of Appeals upheld the plaintiff's claim, recognizing him as the owner of *Rustavi 2*. On 9 September, the Supreme Court accepted to consider this case. The Tbilisi City Court directly interfered with the editorial independence of the media outlet by temporarily replacing its management – on 5 November 2015, the court suspended *Rustavi 2*'s General Director and the Financial Director from their positions. On 13 November 2015, the Constitutional Court repealed this decision.

²⁸ The June 2016 amendments provide that the GPB, *Adjara TV* and community broadcasters shall allot 15 minutes every 3 hours to qualified subjects and not more than 90 seconds every 3 hours to each qualified subject (previously qualified subjects were given 180 seconds per every 3 hours). It also provides that private broadcasters shall allot not less than 7.5 minutes every 3 hours to qualified subjects and not more than 90 seconds every 3 hours to each qualified subject (previously qualified subjects had a minimum guarantee of 90 seconds). For these elections, the CEC identified 11 parties that qualify, but only 9 of them are participating in these elections.

²⁹ The Election Code does not further specify the procedures for allocating this time.

coverage by print media, except for newspapers funded by local government budgets and for provision to grant equal conditions to purchase paid advertising, is not regulated.

Opinion polls are allowed, but shall be accompanied by detailed information on their methodology and the institution that conducted them. Their publication should stop 48 hours before election day, while announcing exit poll outcomes is allowed from 20.00 hours on polling day. The GPB announced the possibility of conducting an exit poll along with three private TV channels which is seen by interlocutors as a threat to its role as an independent public service. As of 19 September, a final decision has not been taken by the GPB.

The Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC), responsible for overseeing the compliance with legal provisions on media coverage, is monitoring 53 TV channels, 30 radio stations and 31 local government funded newspapers. As of 19 September, the GNCC released two reports covering the first two months of the election campaign. These reports do not contain comprehensive information on violations, but detect multiple violations on rules for the publication of opinion polls by broadcasters.

On 5 September, the OSCE/ODIHR EOM commenced its media monitoring with quantitative and qualitative analysis of primetime coverage of six TV channels.³⁰

X. COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

The Election Code establishes an expeditious dispute resolution process for appeals on election commission decisions with one to two days allotted for appeal and consideration. Representatives of parties, blocs, candidates and registered observers have the right to file complaints in all cases; voters only have the right to file complaints on their non-inclusion in a voter list. Decisions of an election commission can be appealed to the respective higher-level commission and then to the district/city court with the Court of Appeals as the final instance for election complaints. The Constitutional Court may examine the constitutionality of electoral legal provisions, on the basis of a claim.³¹

A number of OSCE/ODIHR EOM interlocutors expressed concern about pressure on the judiciary that may influence the independence of the system. The issue has also been previously raised by the President of the Constitutional Court.³²

As of 19 September, 115 complaints were submitted to different levels of the election administration and courts.³³ Complaints are heard in open sessions and parties are informed about the time and place of the hearings. Most complaints were challenging the legality of the appointment of PEC members (7 cases), appealing DEC decisions not to file administrative protocols for alleged election violations (10 cases), or concerned violations of campaign rules (19 cases) and the misuse of administrative resources (15 cases). All complaints and decisions from DEC, the CEC and courts are published online within

³⁰ The monitoring is conducted daily from 18:00 until 24:00. The media outlets monitored are: *GPB 1, Rustavi 2, Imedi, Maestro, GDS* and *TV Pirveli*.

³¹ President of Georgia, Public Defender of Georgia and one fifth of the members of parliament have the right to lodge constitutional claims regarding elections.

³² On 21 July, the President of the Constitutional Court claimed that some judges of the Court are being pressured and blackmailed to either rule in favour of the authorities or drag out verdicts in several high-profile cases that are now under consideration in the Court. On 25 June, the President of Georgia held a press-conference highlighting the importance of a prompt and adequate response to the cases of interference with judicial proceedings.

³³ Of the 115 complaints, 54 were submitted to DEC, 39 to the CEC, 13 to Tbilisi City Court and 9 to the Court of Appeals.

one day on the CEC website. Of the 115 complaints filed, only 4 were satisfied and 3 were partially satisfied.

As in previous elections, an Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) was established to address potential election violence and the abuse of state resources. The IATF is composed of high-level officials and is to meet twice a month before the completion of party list registration and then once a week until the finalization of results; it issues non-binding recommendations. All parties and observers are entitled to be present and participate in the sessions. Party representatives have raised concerns about alleged cases of violence and a misuse of state resources after which the government agencies provided information on what measures had been taken. Thus far, the IATF has held five sessions and issued three recommendations.³⁴

XI. CITIZEN AND INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS

The Election Code provides for observation by citizen and international organizations, as well as representatives of election subjects. The legislation contains detailed provisions on the rights and responsibilities of observers and grants them access to the all stages of the electoral process. As of 16 September, the CEC registered 63 citizen and 30 international organizations (including visiting election management bodies). Various citizen observer' organizations are conducting long-term election observation activities focusing on different aspects of the pre-election environment, campaign finance, media monitoring and election complaints and disputes.

Parties, initiative groups and candidates can nominate two representatives per election commission, but only one representative at a time can be present in commission meetings and in the PEC on election day.

XII. PARTICIPATION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES

According to the 2014 census, national minorities make up 13.2 per cent of the population. The most numerous groups are the Azeri (6.3 per cent) and the Armenians (4.5 per cent).³⁵ Following recent amendments to the Election Code, the OSCE/ODIHR EOM interlocutors expressed concerns that some of the new boundaries between constituencies may decrease the representation of national minorities, particularly in the merged Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda constituency.³⁶ Several parties and blocs nominated members of national minorities on their party lists³⁷ and for the majoritarian races in minority populated regions.³⁸

The Election Code contains provisions for the translation of VLs, ballots, protocols, and other election materials in minority languages, and the CEC intends to provide voter education and information materials in Azeri and Armenian, including on the GPB. Further, the CEC operates a tri-lingual hotline

³⁴ Among others, it recommended all parties to ask their supporters and activists to refrain from attending public gatherings of other parties and not to arrange counter demonstrations/gatherings against the competing parties.

³⁵ Followed by Russians (0.7), Ossetians (0.4), Yazidis (0.3), Ukrainians (0.2), Kists (0.2), Greeks (0.1), Assyrians (0.1) and other groups (0.4).

³⁶ The merger of Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda into one constituency (as well as some villages of the former Akhalkalaki constituency merging with the Borjomi-Aspindza constituency) could have an impact on the representation of the ethnic Armenians from the Samtskhe-Javakheti region. The number of constituencies in the largely ethnic Azeri region of Kvemo Kartli has been increased.

³⁷ On party lists: GD – 10 of 155, UNM – 12 of 200, FD – 10 of 200; the election bloc led by SP – 20 out of 197 candidates; none of these candidates are placed above the 18th position.

³⁸ Majoritarian candidates: GD 3 of 73 nominated; UNM 5 of 72; SP 6 of 72; APG 4 of 71; FD 1 of 64; NF 1 out of 54; and 4 independents.

in Georgian, Azeri and Armenian languages and provides information in the Abkhaz language on its website. The CEC held a small grants competition, awarding funds to eight NGOs to implement projects aimed to increase the participation of national minorities in the electoral process.

XIII. OSCE/ODIHR EOM ACTIVITIES

The OSCE/ODIHR EOM commenced its work on 30 August. The Head of the OSCE/ODIHR EOM met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the CEC, the Chairperson of the Parliament, the President of the Constitutional Court, other high-level state officials and representatives of OSCE participating States. The OSCE/ODIHR EOM has also established contacts with political parties, civil society, representatives of the media and other electoral stakeholders.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), the European Parliament and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (NATO PA) intend to deploy delegations for election day observation. Ignacio Sanchez Amor has been appointed by the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office as Special Co-ordinator and Leader of the OSCE short-term observer mission. The OSCE/ODIHR EOM conducted briefings for the pre-election delegations of PACE and the OSCE PA. Election day observation will be the result of a common endeavour involving the OSCE/ODIHR and delegations from the OSCE PA, PACE, the European Parliament and NATO PA.

*The English version of this report is the only official document.
An unofficial translation is available in Georgian.*