



NGOs respond to reports on pressure on candidates in eleven election districts

It was reported in recent days that candidates of various opposition parties, who had declared about their participation in elections through party list or majoritarian seats, have been withdrawing their candidacies as a result of pressure. Various opposition parties talk about such facts and provide NGOs with relevant information. Victims mostly do not specify as to who was pressuring them.

Apart from the fact that threatening and pressuring persons is a crime, it is important that revocation of registration of existing candidates in the party lists may create other risks as well. In particular, owing to insufficient number of candidates on a party list, the District Election Commissions may overall deregister a party. The law sets the following criteria in this respect: if the number of voters in an election district exceeds 75,000, there must be at least 15 candidates on a proportionate list, and if less than 75,000, then minimum 10 candidates. Pursuant to the Election Code, if no later than the second day prior to the polling day, the number of candidates on a registered party list turns out to be less than the above-mentioned minimum, the election registration of a party list will be revoked, i.e. the party will no longer be able to participate in the Sakrebulo (town/city council) elections in this election district based on the proportional election system.

Substantial doubt arises that pressure on the opposition candidates aims to cancel registration the party lists, especially when similar facts set a kind of trend already. At this stage we are aware of such cases reported in ten districts of the five regions.

Kvemo Kartli:

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In Dmanisi, where there are minimum 10 candidates on a proportional list, initially five candidates (Almaz Ramzanov, Elmuraz Gasanov, Shakhvadin Kojaev, Stambul Kurbanov, Makhmud Ovchiev) from the 15-candidate list of the United National Movement have withdrawn their nominations. One additional candidate's refusal to be on the list would result in annulment of the list. As of today, one candidate Kurban Mamedov has changed the decision to deregister, and at this moment there are no grounds for deregistering the election list. Yet, he hesitates and states he prefers not being on the party list. Mamedov claims he and his family are already disturbed from calls made from a secret telephone number. "They don't let me live quietly, they call me and tell me I should leave the party." The Christian-Democratic Party also experiences problems in Dmanisi, where their candidates are also forced to write applications on deregistration. Five candidates have deregistered (Andiashvili Giorgi - majoritarian candidate and on a party list, Eldar Pakeliani - majoritarian candidate and on a party list, Davit Ognadze - majoritarian candidate and on a party list, Lia Pilpani - on a party list, Mahmed Mahmudov - majoritarian candidate and on a party list) from the political union "Christian Democratic Movement" (Nino Burjanadze - United Opposition), following which the party's party list was annulled and they will be unable to compete in elections through the proportional system.

Leon Mikaelian in the Darakov community and Gulara Mamedova in the Sarvani community from the United National Movement have withdrawn in Tsalka. The latter has not yet written the application, but has already notified the Chair of the District Commission about withdrawal of her nomination.

Candidate of the United National Movement on the position of the Marneuli Municipality Gamgebeli (local governor) Akhmed Imamkuliev confirms he was sent a message through his closely related person to withdraw candidacy, but without naming the source of this message.

Candidate of the United National Movement in Tetrtskaro Janiko Guluashvili and the majoritarian candidate in Manglisi Zurab Badalashvili, who was 5th on the party list, have withdrawn the candidacies.

Samtskhe-Javakheti:

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There must be at least 10 candidates on the list in Akhaltsikhe as well. Salome Zurabishvili's political party Georgia's Way has submitted the 11-candidate list. In few days after the submission, three candidates (Manana Iadze, Ioseb Aspanidze, Nino Narimanidze) have withdrawn their nominations, thus resulting in deregistration of the party's party list. This means that the party will be unable to participate in the Sakrebulo elections based on the proportional election system. Further, according to the party, two majoritarian candidates (Ioseb Martinenko, Aleko Tamaradze) of the Georgian Way have also stated about their deregistrations because of pressure. Akhaltsikhe majoritarian candidate and No. 12 on the proportional list from the United National Movement, Malkhaz Ivanidze has also withdrawn his candidacy.

majoritarian candidate from the United National Movement in Borjomi Ivane Gelashvili has also withdrawn. He has remained on the proportional list, but will be unable to compete with the majoritarian candidates of other parties.

The Ude community majoritarian candidate and No. 2 on the list in Adigeni, Ramaz Merabishvili from the United National Movement has also withdrawn his nomination.

majoritarian candidate from the United National Movement in Akhalkalaki Genadi Zedginidze has also withdrawn under suspicious circumstances.

Mtskheta-Mtianeti:

Mtskheta representative of the People's Party Lasha Bolotashvili claims that three proportional list candidates (Giorgi Gigineishvili, Ilia Osepashvili, Mamuka Makharashvili) and one majoritarian candidate (Davit Osepashvili) of the People's Party in Mtskheta have addressed the party with request to withdraw their candidacies. He alleges further that the Mtskheta majoritarian MP Dimitry Khundadze has exerted pressure on the candidates.

Kakheti:

As the village Samtatskaro majoritarian candidate Paata Nadiradze from the United National Movement claims, local authorities in Dedoplistskaro have exercised pressure on them concerning the withdrawal of nominees. majoritarian candidate alleges he

was threatened that his brother, who serves in the special police service, would experience problems. According to the Gamagebeli candidate of the United National Movement Emzar Janashvili, representatives of the local authorities have threatened him that his spouse would lose a job at "Socar Georgia" LLC unless he would withdraw his nomination voluntarily.

Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti:

majoritarian candidate of the United National Movement in Lentekhi Iulon Tvildiani has withdrawn his candidacy under suspicious circumstances.

NGOs call on:

The Ministry of Interior and the Chief Prosecutor's Office, to probe into the above-described facts and eliminate any pressure on the election nominees or party activists. These reports include elements of a crime, in which case the law obligates law-enforcement agencies to launch investigation. Further, in view of significance and potential scales of the issue, it is crucial to conduct investigation rapidly and effectively, and to hold those liable whose guilt the investigation ascertains. It is important to study these elements of the crime and carry out statutory sanctions upon need;

The Inter-Agency Commission, to inquire into alleged facts of pressure on the candidates and address the law-enforcement and local authorities with relevant recommendations;

The civil servants of the local self-government, not to exceed statutory powers, which may result in their criminal liability;

The representatives of political parties, to address law-enforcement agencies in all similar cases and to inform public through media and NGOs.