

საქართველოს ახალგაზრდა იურისტთა ასოციაცია GEORGIAN YOUNG LAWYERS' ASSOCIATION



GYLA Responds to Remarks made by the Minister of Defense of Georgia

We would like to respond to the remarks made by the Minister of Defense of Georgia to the media on January 27th, about special electoral precincts. The Minister claimed that NGOs had not shown any interest in the issue of electoral precincts before, adding that neither her nor any relevant official at the Ministry had been approached by any of the NGOs with a request for public information. The Minister urged NGOs in general and GYLA's employees in particular to "respect the organization" and be "a bit more professional". [\[1\]](#)

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The Minister of Defense made the statement after GYLA, the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED), and Transparency International – Georgia held a joint briefing to evaluate new regulations about special precincts proposed by the government. The briefing stated that the initiative of the Ministry of Defense about the abolishment of special precincts in military units is inadequate to substantially address the problems in military voting, or the risk of manipulation of military votes. [2] The legal gaps and the possibility of their abuse have been criticized by local and international organizations on numerous occasions. **Recognizing that the legal draft prepared by the Ministry fails to address the risks of abuse does not require accessing any type of public information.**

As to GYLA's interest in the issue of special precincts, as early as January 14th 2016, we addressed the Ministry of Defense and its three agencies in writing and requested public information about participation of military workers in the Gamagebeli by-elections in Gardabani Municipality. [3] Our request has not received a response, which amounts to a refusal to provide access to public information and violates Georgian law.

We regret that instead of providing a reasoned explanation as to why the government has chosen not to make any substantial changes to the rules on military voting, why the risk of manipulation of military votes remains, or arguments to invalidate our position, the Minister is trying to destroy the reputation of the organizations and their representatives. We believe that such statements are contrary to and damaging to the policy of cooperative and constructive relations with non-governmental organizations declared two days ago by the Prime Minister of Georgia.

Unfortunately, similar statements have been made by high government officials in the past. We regret that due to a lack of counter arguments, members of the government are looking for ways to insult and destroy the reputation of NGOs and their representatives. We especially regret that such tactics are employed by a former member of the NGO sector.

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We believe that NGO professionalism above all implies honesty and open discussions about gaps in law or practice. **We always stand ready to engage in discussions with any official or government agency; however, attempts to silence NGOs are unacceptable in any way or form.**

[1] <http://www.interpressnews.ge/ge/politika/363690-thina-khidasheli-arasamthavroboebs-da-gansakuthrebith-saia-s-qcota-met-profesionalizismiskenq-moutsodebs.html>

[2] <https://gyla.ge/ge/post/khelisufleba-samkhedro-mosamsakhureebis-khmis-micemis-tsess-arsebitad-ar-cvlis>

[3] 14.01.16 c-04/09-16, internal ref. #380020 MOD 416