



Statements of the Prime Minister will have Adverse Impact on Pre-Election Processes

On May 31, Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Gharibashvili visited Ozurgeti and Lanchkhuti where he met with local population and nominated candidates of the coalition Georgian Dream for the local self-government elections in Guria. During his visits the Prime Minister stated that the Georgian Dream will not allow victory in the elections by any other political party in any city or district. He also said that they “they will get rid of any remnants of the ‘Nationals’”. In addition, the Ministry of Internal affairs also released a statement on June 1 rejecting allegations about pressuring election candidates without having conducted a probe. Therefore, reports about opposition candidates removing themselves from registration as a result of alleged pressure come as no surprise.

We believe that inadequate response of the Prime Minister and the Interior Ministry to alleged acts of pressure in the regions will interfere with the key principle for fair elections, the principle of fair competition, and has an adverse impact on the pre-election environment.

These statements further aggravate the situation throughout the country. Notably, up to 50 candidates of 6 opposition parties in 15 districts of 8 regions have already withdrawn their candidacies amid alleged pressure, which will lead to the abolishment of proportional lists of opposition parties in a number of election districts. Failure of the authorities and the prosecution services to act has further contributed to the dangerous trend that we emphasized several days early. For instance, recently the United National Movement informed us that Bavakan Asatriani, candidate for the office of majoritarian member of Sakrebulo nominated in Marneuli as well as Kakhaber Kiladze, candidate for the office of majoritarian member of Sakrebulo in Ozurgeti and

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the following candidates nominated through proportional list in Dmanisi – Kurban Mamedov, Marine Begdarashvili, Shota Aduashvili and Arvelodi Razmadze have formally withdrawn their candidacies. Notably, after submitting a letter of withdrawal of his candidacy, Kurban Mamedow filed another letter to the district election commission reporting that three unidentified persons pressured him at night and forced him to write the letter on withdrawal of his candidacy. Notably, six members of proportionate list of the UNM in Dmanisi are refusing to participate in the elections. Furthermore, the Non-Parliamentary Opposition election bloc has informed us that their candidates in several election districts have abolished their election registration. In particular, candidate in the community of Leghva Village in Kobuleti Kakha Ananidze removed his candidacy. He stated that in exchange, he was offered a plea bargain for a member of his family currently in prison. In Khulo District the following three candidates for the office of a majoritarian member of Sakrebulo withdrew their candidacies – Zaur Shainidze nominated by the Non-Parliamentary Opposition Kakha Kukava – Pikria Chikhradze and Gigla Surmanidze nominated by Burjanadze – Unified Opposition. Independent candidate Tamaz Iremadze also withdrew his candidacy, as well as Tariel Bardaveladze, majoritarian candidate for Bardubani community in Terjola and Murman Gvimradze, a candidate for Mereti Village in Gori.

The chairperson of the Central Elections Commission responded to these facts with a May 31 statement, saying that such actions are a direct threat of unequal election environment and may be harmful for the election process.

Notably, there have been many other withdrawals of candidacies throughout the country in addition to what was described above. However, it does not necessarily mean that all candidates have withdrawn themselves as a result of pressure. The CEC has reported that as of May 30, 2013, total of 385 candidates have withdrawn their candidacies following registration in various election districts and the CEC, only two of which are candidates of the coalition Georgian Dream. Out of the 385 candidate who have withdrawn their candidacies, 256 are independent candidates, the rest represented various political parties.

We believe that since withdrawal of candidacies as a result of alleged pressure has become a dangerous trend, the head of the government should refrain from making statements that will further promote the process. Such messages can be perceived as direct instructions for those who are involved in administration of the elections or

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participate in pre-election processes in various forms. Instead of addressing the problem and strictly condemning the alarming trend for it to stop, the Prime Minister made public statements that provide indirect encouragement for such actions. Further, the risk of wrongful perception of such statements is particularly high in Georgia with a multi-year tradition of ruling by a single party and abuse of public resources by ruling parties.

The below signatories urge the Prime Minister of Georgia to refrain from making statements that contradict the spirit of democratic election process and jeopardize independent self-government and consolidation of multi-party democracy in Georgia;

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia to refrain from making hasty and unfounded statements, and to launch immediate probe into alleged pressure on election candidates in the regions for the purpose of examining acts of pressure in the shortest time frame possible.

International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy
Transparency International – Georgia
Georgian Young Lawyers' Association