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**GEORGIAN
YOUNG
LAWYERS'
ASSOCIATION**

Free, Fair and Equal Electoral-Political 2019-2022 Cycle in Georgia

NEWSLETTER №31
April, 2022

Tbilisi, 2022

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This newsletter was made possible by the generous support of the American People through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents of this newsletter are the sole responsibility of “Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association” (GYLA) and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.



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INTRODUCTION

The Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) has started implementing the Free, Fair, and Equal Election Political Cycle 2019-2022 project throughout the country in August 2019. One of the project's goals is to promote the improvement of the election environment through monitoring and evidence-based advocacy. To achieve this, the organization will monitor ongoing political processes and develop recommendations that will be communicated to the public and presented to decision-makers. At the moment, we present the Newsletter №31, which describes the events of April 2022 that have had an impact on the political environment.

I. BY-ELECTIONS IN BATUMI AND RUSTAVI

By-elections were held on April 2, 2022, in Batumi and Rustavi.¹ A majoritarian member of the Parliament of Georgia was elected in the 12th majoritarian constituency of Rustavi and Gardabani, and a majoritarian member of the Batumi Sakrebulo was elected in the 4th local constituency of Batumi.² A total of three candidates were nominated in Rustavi: Mamuka Tuskadze (#34) – the party For Social Justice, Kamal Muradkhanov (#59) – the Georgian Unity and Development Party, and Irakli Shatikashvili (#41) – the Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia.³ Two candidates competed in Batumi: Mate Putkaradze (#5) from the United National Movement party and Ramaz Jincharadze (# 41) from the Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia.⁴

According to the final results, Irakli Shatikashvili, the candidate of the Georgian Dream, won in Rustavi with 90.61%,⁵ and Ramaz Jincharadze, the candidate of the same party, won with 69.04% in Batumi.⁶

The authority of Ramaz Jincharadze, a newly elected member of the Batumi City Council, could not be approved in April,⁷ as the session convened at the Batumi City Council on April 12 at the initiative of the Georgian Dream could not be opened due to a lack of quorum.⁸ Members of the United National Movement, the party For Georgia and Lelo, as well as an independent MP, did not attend the sitting.⁹

The Georgian Young Lawyers' Association observed the by-elections in Batumi.¹⁰ **According to the results of the observation mission, cases of violations and agitation at the perimeter of the polling station and the control of the will of the voters were revealed during the voting.**¹¹ **In total, GYLA addressed the police twice due to violations, filed 3 complaints, and submitted up to 10 written remarks.**¹² **The organization will also publish a detailed assessment of the by-elections in the form of a report.**

¹ "Elections are being held in Batumi and Rustavi", information portal Radio Tavisupleba, April 2, 2022, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31782370.html>, updated: 11.05.2022.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ "The CEC has summarized the final results of the by-elections of the Parliament of Georgia", official website of the Central Election Commission, April 7, 2022, available at: <https://bit.ly/39TEGKi>, updated: 11.05.2022.

⁶ "Batumi District Election Commission summed up the results of the by-elections on April 2, 2022", official website of the Central Election Commission, April 8, 2022, available at: <https://bit.ly/3witjV0>, updated: 11.05.2022.

⁷ Facebook page of Batumi Municipality Sakrebulo, April 12, 2022, available at: <https://bit.ly/3wjy13A>, updated: 11.05.2022.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Facebook page of Batumi Municipality Sakrebulo, April 12, 2022, available at: <https://bit.ly/3wjy13A>, updated: 11.05.2022.

¹⁰ "GYLA Observation Mission on Election Day", official website of the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, April 2, 2022, available at: <https://bit.ly/3yDNGNR>, updated: 11.05.2022.

¹¹ "Summary of the observation results of the 2022 Batumi Sakrebulo by-elections", official website of the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, April 2, 2022, available at: <https://bit.ly/39cBEAp>, updated: 11.05.2022.

¹² Ibid.

II. ELECTRONIC ELECTIONS IN BATUMI 4TH MAJORITARIAN CONSTITUENCY

It should be noted that the preliminary results of the Batumi by-elections were presented by the Central Election Commission within 1 hour after the end of the voting process.¹³ These data became available as a result of electronic technologies used in the 4th majoritarian constituency of Batumi: voter verification, voting, and counting machines.¹⁴

On April 29, the Central Election Commission (CEC) presented a report on its assessment of the use of electronic technologies in elections.¹⁵ The Chairperson of the CEC, Giorgi Kalandarishvili, evaluated the use of electronic technologies in the pilot mode as successful and noted that the attitude of the voters towards them turned out to be positive.¹⁶ According to Kalandarishvili, the pilot process revealed that the use of electronic technologies in Georgia had great prospects, and their large-scale introduction was being considered in the future.¹⁷

III. THE CASE OF MIKHEIL SAAKASHVILI

On April 20, the third president of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili, demanded to be removed from the courtroom during the hearing of the case of the Illegal Border Crossing at the Tbilisi City Court and requested medical assistance.¹⁸ Returning to the hall, he spoke about his state of health and said that he had not been able to undergo proper rehabilitation since the end of the hunger strike; His health condition has deteriorated, and he has lost 12 kg in recent days.¹⁹

On April 22, members of the medical concilium formed by the Public Defender visited Mikheil Saakashvili in a detention facility.²⁰ On April 27, the Public Defender's Office released the results of the monitoring of Mikheil Saakashvili's health.²¹ According to the report, compared to the last visit on January 11, the health of the third president had significantly deteriorated.²² According to the conclusion of the concilium, a full course of psychotherapy and physical rehabilitation was recommended to improve the health of the third president.²³ The report also noted that the recommendations made by the ombudsman's panel of experts regarding the course of treatment in December-January had not been implemented.²⁴

According to a statement issued by the Special Penitentiary Service on April 29, Mikheil Saakashvili's health condition was constantly monitored, and all necessary medical services were provided.²⁵ However, sometimes,

¹³ "The CEC submitted the preliminary data of the Batumi elections one hour after the end of the by-elections", official website of the Central Election Commission, April 2, 2022, available at: <https://bit.ly/3L8NAQX>, updated: 11.05.2022.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ "Presentation of the report on the use of electronic technologies in the electoral process", official website of the Central Election Commission, April 29, 2022, available at: <https://bit.ly/3MbT66R>, updated: 11.05.2022.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ "Court Orders Penitentiary to Provide Proper Medical Treatment to Saakashvili", information portal Civil.ge, April 20, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/486816>, updated: 11.05.2022.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ "Members of the Ombudsman's Concilium visited Mikheil Saakashvili", information portal Radio Tavisupleba, April 25, 2022, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31819824.html>, updated: 11.05.2022.

²¹ Facebook page of the Public Defender of Georgia, April 27, 2022, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=>, updated: 11.05.2022.

²² According to doctors, the patient's body was starved of protein, which led to weakness and muscle wasting. He also suffered from anorexia and depression.

²³ See Facebook page of the Public Defender of Georgia, April 27, 2022, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=>, updated: 11.05.2022.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁴ "Public Defender's Council: Saakashvili has protein starvation, which causes muscle breakdown", information portal Radio Tavisupleba, April 27, 2022, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31823520.html>, updated: 11.05.2022.

²⁵ Facebook page of the Special Penitentiary Service, April 29, 2022, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=>, updated: 11.05.2022.

despite the recommendation of doctors, the third president refused to take some medications prescribed for him.²⁶ According to the Penitentiary Service, any statement that Mikheil Saakashvili was not receiving proper medical treatment was a lie and was intended to mislead the public.²⁷

Irakli Kobakhidze, Chairperson of the Georgian Dream party, responded to the conclusion of the Public Defender's Office.²⁸ According to Kobakhidze, those who demanded that Mikheil Saakashvili be taken abroad for medical treatment wanted to “start a war” in Georgia.²⁹ The ombudsman described the statement as a “political attack” and said that “no qualified, competent arguments”³⁰ had been made in response to the conclusion of the concilium she had set up. She advised the authorities to build a team of doctors to decide where and in what form to treat Mikheil Saakashvili.³¹ On April 29, the United National Movement party announced at a briefing that protests demanding Mikheil Saakashvili's medical treatment abroad would begin in Batumi on May 6.³²

IV. OFFICIAL SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE FOR EU CANDIDATE STATUS

On April 9, EU Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement Olivér Várhelyi wrote on Twitter that on Monday, April 11, he would hand over the official EU Membership Questionnaire to Georgia and Moldova.³³ On April 11, Várhelyi passed the questionnaire to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Ilia Darchiashvili, in Luxembourg.³⁴ Olivér Várhelyi published another “tweet” after handing over the Questionnaire.³⁵ He said that handing over the questionnaire to Georgia was “the first step on the European path” and that the European Commission was ready to work urgently to submit the opinion (avis) to the European Council in a short time.³⁶ According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, after receiving the self-assessment Questionnaire, the process of Georgia's integration into the European Union has moved to a “substantively new stage.”³⁷ At a press conference on April 11, Irakli Kobakhidze, Chairperson of the Georgian Dream party, said that the Georgian government would ensure that the Questionnaire was properly filled out.³⁸

To ensure the transparency and efficiency of the Questionnaire filling process, GYLA, together with other non-governmental organizations, held a working meeting on April 14 with the Chairperson of the Parliamentary Committee on European Integration, Maka Bochorishvili, and members of the Committee.³⁹ The non-governmental organizations presented their views on the European integration process to the Committee.⁴⁰

The President of Georgia, Salome Zurbashvili, responded to the receipt of the Questionnaire.⁴¹ According to her, filling in the Questionnaire was a matter of national interest, and “all forces” should have been mobilized to par-

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ “Lomjaria responds to Kobakhidze: We see political attacks, absurd accusations”, information portal Radio Tavisupleba, April 28, 2022, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31825475.html>, updated: 11.05.2022.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² “UNM is announcing rallies in Batumi demanding Saakashvili to be taken abroad for medical treatment”, information portal Radio Tavisupleba, April 29, 2022, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31826887.html>, updated: 11.05.2022.

³³ Olivér Várhelyi, Twitter post, April 9, 2022, 12:39 PM, available at: <https://twitter.com/OliverVarhelyi/status>, updated: 11.05.2022.

³⁴ “Georgia has received the EU membership Questionnaire”, information portal Radio Tavisupleba, April 11, 2022, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31796999.html>, updated: 11.05.2022.

³⁵ “Georgia Receives EU Membership Questionnaire”, information portal Civil.ge, April 11, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/485157>, updated: 11.05.2022.

³⁶ Oliver Varhelyi, Twitter post, April 11, 2022, 2:59 PM, available at: <https://twitter.com/OliverVarhelyi/status/>, updated: 11.05.2022.

³⁷ “Georgia has received the EU membership Questionnaire”, information portal Radio Tavisupleba, April 11, 2022, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31796999.html>, updated: 11.05.2022.

³⁸ “Kobakhidze: We are sure that Georgia will definitely become a member of the European Union”, information portal Radio Tavisupleba, April 11, 2022, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31797567.html>, updated: 11.05.2022.

³⁹ “The meeting of the EU Integration Committee with NGOs”, official website of the Parliament of Georgia, April 14, 2022, available at: <https://bit.ly/3swNKLs>, updated: 11.05.2022.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ “We received a Questionnaire from the EU that we had not expected for years”, information portal Radio Tavisupleba, April 11, 2022, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31797331.html>, updated: 11.05.2022

icipate.⁴² In response, Irakli Kobakhidze noted that involvement of the United National Movement in the process would be “counterproductive” because they were acting against the country’s interests.⁴³ He also said that the decision to make the Questionnaire public would be made after consultation with the EU.⁴⁴

On April 14, eight members of the parliamentary opposition⁴⁵ wrote a letter to EU Commissioner Olivér Várhegyi.⁴⁶ In the letter, they demanded that the government release the Questionnaire based on the high interest of the people, political parties, and civil society. In their view, the Georgian authorities were reluctant to do so, saying that they needed the EU to permit to make the Questionnaire public.⁴⁷ Accordingly, the signatory MPs requested assistance from the Commissioner in this process.⁴⁸

On April 15, the Georgian government released the first part of the EU Questionnaire.⁴⁹ The 42-page document consisted of 369 questions.⁵⁰ The questions were distributed according to political and economic criteria.⁵¹ The political criterion included questions on the functioning of democratic institutions and protection of human rights in the country, while the economic criterion assessed the stability and competitiveness of the Georgian economy.⁵²

On April 29, the Georgian government released the second part of the Questionnaire.⁵³ The 238-page document contained up to 2,300 questions.⁵⁴ Georgia was given time until May 13 to complete the EU Questionnaire.⁵⁵ According to the government administration, the first part of the Questionnaire has already been completed. It will be handed over to the EU Ambassador to Georgia, Carl Hartzell, on May 2.⁵⁶ The second part would also be handed over to the EU before the scheduled time of May 13.⁵⁷ According to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Iliia Darchiashvili, the government would refrain from publishing the answers to the Questionnaire because there were “issues that were not desirable and expedient to publish.”⁵⁸

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ “Kobakhidze: Those who do not undermine the country will be involved in filling in the EU Questionnaire, information portal Radio Tavisupleba”, April 14, 2022, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31803095.html>, updated: 11.05.2022.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ These MPs are: Armaz Akhvlediani, Teona Akubardia, Ana Buchukuri, Khatia Dekanoidze, Tamar Kordzaia, Ana Natsvlishvili, Salome Samadashvili, Khatuna Samnidze.

See “The opposition is asking the European Commissioner for help in getting acquainted with the Questionnaire handed over to Georgia”, information portal Radio Tavisupleba, April 14, 2022, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31803736.html>, updated: 11.05.2022.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ “Opposition Appeals EU Commissioner over Questionnaire”, information portal Civil.ge, April 15, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/486026>, updated: 11.05.2022.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ “Georgia’s EU Questionnaire Made Public”, information portal Civil.ge, April 15, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/486121>, updated: 11.05.2022.

⁵⁰ „Questionnaire: Information requested by the European Commission to the Government of Georgia for the preparation of the Opinion on the application of Georgia for membership of the European Union“, part 1, April, 2022, accessible: <https://bit.ly/3Ladlk2>, updated: 11.05.2022.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² “Georgia’s EU Questionnaire made public”, information portal Civil.ge, April 15, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/486121>, updated: 11.05.2022.

⁵³ “The Government of Georgia has published the second part of the European Commission Questionnaire”, information portal Radio Tavisupleba, April 29, 2022, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31827272.html>, updated: 11.05.2022.

⁵⁴ „Questionnaire: Information requested by the European Commission to the Government of Georgia for the preparation of the Opinion on the application of Georgia for membership of the European Union“, part 2, April, 2022, available at: <https://bit.ly/3yQzTnt>, updated: 11.05.2022.

⁵⁵ Georgia to Submit Part of EU Questionnaire on Monday, information portal Civil.ge, April 30, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/488240>, updated: 11.05.2022.

⁵⁶ “The Government of Georgia has published the second part of the European Commission Questionnaire”, information portal Radio Tavisupleba, April 29, 2022, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31827272.html>, updated: 11.05.2022.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

V. VISIT OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT DELEGATION TO GEORGIA

In parallel with the handover of the EU self-assessment Questionnaire, a delegation of the European Parliament's Security and Defense Subcommittee visited Georgia on April 10-14.⁵⁹ The delegation included: the Deputy Chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs, Security and Defense Subcommittee, Lucas Mandley (the Group of the European People's Party, Christian Democrats); The members of the subcommittee: Juožas Olekas (the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats) and Elena Yoncheva (the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats) and MEP Lars Patrick Berg (the Group of European Conservatives and Reformists).⁶⁰ The MEPs met with the President of Georgia, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Defense, and members of Parliament from both the majority and the opposition.⁶¹

At a press conference at the Tbilisi Marriott Hotel on April 11, Lucas Mandley responded to the handover of the EU Questionnaire to Georgia, saying it was “the start of the beginning.”⁶² He called on the Georgian parliament to support the country's prospects of joining the European Union.⁶³ At the same press conference, EU Ambassador to Georgia Carl Hartzell said that the EU was considering the applications of Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine with unprecedented speed, which made this process a historic moment.⁶⁴ In such a situation, the “ball was in Georgia's court,” and the country had to do everything to “activate the reform agenda” and “prepare itself for Europe and the world” to use this historic opportunity.⁶⁵

VI. US DEPARTMENT OF STATE ANNUAL REPORT ON THE STATE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

On April 12, 2022, the US Department of State released its annual report on the state of human rights.⁶⁶ It highlights problems in the field of justice, including the power of an influential group of judges within the judiciary - the “clan” and the lack of transparency in the work of the High Council of Justice.⁶⁷ **It should be noted that during the discussion of justice issues, the document repeatedly referred to the studies and statements of the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association.**⁶⁸

The State Department report also assessed the 2021 local self-government elections.⁶⁹ According to the report, although political parties had the opportunity to campaign in a free and competitive environment, the pre-election period was characterized by acts of violence, voter bribery, and pressure on candidates and voters.⁷⁰ Also, as a result of misuse of administrative resources and unequal distribution of resources, in the first and second rounds of local self-government elections, the line between the ruling party and the government was further blurred.⁷¹

⁵⁹ “A delegation of the Subcommittee on Security and Defence of the European Parliament will visit Georgia”, information portal Radio Tavisupleba, April 10, 2022, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31795538.html>, updated: 11.05.2022.

⁶⁰ “MEPs Meet Georgian Leaders, Lawmakers”, information portal Civil.ge, April 12, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/485361>, updated: 11.05.2022.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² “Lucas Mandl calls on Georgian parliamentarians to support EU membership prospects”, information portal Radio Tavisupleba, April 11, 2022, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31797459.html>, updated: 11.05.2022.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ “Carl Hartzell: Ball is now in Georgia's court. The European Union is ready to support”, information portal Radio Tavisupleba, April 11, 2022, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31797538.html>, updated: 11.05.2022.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ “U.S. Report Critical on Human Rights Practices in Georgia”, information portal Civil.ge, April 13, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/485861>, updated: 11.05.2022.

⁶⁷ “2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Georgia”, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, US Department of State, April 2022, p. 17, available at: <https://bit.ly/3sv3wXq>, updated: 11.05.2022.

⁶⁸ “Critical Assessment by the US Department of State on the Human Rights Situation in Georgia in 2021”, official website of the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, April 14, 2022, available at: <https://bit.ly/3sBUkjR>, updated: 11.05.2022.

⁶⁹ „2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Georgia”, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, US Department of State, April 2022, pp. 53-54.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

VII. OSCE/ODIHR FINAL REPORT ON 2021 LOCAL ELECTIONS

The final report of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission, which summarized the first (October 2) and second (October 30) rounds of the 2021 local elections, was published on April 8.⁷²

According to the ODIHR report, political parties had the opportunity to campaign in a more or less free and competitive environment, but the election environment was damaged by “widespread and consistent statements” about pressure, voter intimidation, and bribery,⁷³ as well as the imbalance of financial resources between the ruling party and the opposition, the lack of mechanisms for ensuring campaign transparency and accountability, and the “inappropriate advantage of being in power.”⁷⁴ Frequent and consistent reporting of voter bribery, intimidation, and harassment by political parties, voters, and election subjects created the risk that voters would not be able to exercise their voting right “without fear of retribution.”⁷⁵

In addition, the pre-election campaign took place during extreme political polarization and a protracted political crisis.⁷⁶ The negative rhetoric was especially intense during the second round.⁷⁷

The report assessed the legal framework for the elections as suitable for holding the elections democratically, although it still contained shortcomings.⁷⁸ Also, despite the changes made under the agreement of April 19, 2021, the election legislation has not been properly revised.⁷⁹ The reforms reflected some of the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations but did not include number of important recommendations on how to recount votes, increase the transparency of campaign funding, and investigate the misuse of administrative resources.⁸⁰ Recommendations for expanding the power of appeal and conducting effective investigations were also to be considered.⁸¹

As for the direct voting environment, according to the report, both rounds of elections, despite the shortcomings observed during the vote count, were administered correctly.⁸² The voting process was “orderly and transparent.”⁸³ Still, the mobilization of the representatives of political parties and groups of people around polling stations who “had a potential impact on voters”, was problematic.⁸⁴

It is noteworthy that the document considered the unequal participation of women in the electoral process to be challenging and stated that this fact indicated the need to take on additional responsibilities to increase women’s representation.⁸⁵

⁷² “ODIHR’s Final Report on October 2021 Local Elections”, information portal Civil.ge, April 26, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/487428>, updated: 11.05.2022.

⁷³ “Georgia - Final Report: Municipal Elections - October 2 and 30, 2021”, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, April 2022, p. 1, available at: <https://bit.ly/38urmLT>, updated: 11.05.2022.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 2.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 5

⁷⁶ “Georgia - Final Report: Municipal Elections - October 2 and 30, 2021”, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, April 2022, p. 2.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ “Georgia - Final Report: Municipal Elections - October 2 and 30, 2021”, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, April 2022, p. 3.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ “Georgia - Final Report: Municipal Elections - October 2 and 30, 2021”, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, April 2022, p. 7.

⁸² Ibid., p. 2.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

VIII. INTERNATIONAL REPUBLICAN INSTITUTE PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY

The International Republican Institute (IRI) Public Opinion Survey was published on April 27.⁸⁶ The survey reflected the results of a population survey conducted between March 4-24, 2022.⁸⁷

According to the study, compared to 2021, the number of citizens who believed that democracy is the best form of government for Georgia has decreased from 77% to 64%.⁸⁸ At the same time, the share of respondents who were more or less satisfied with the democratic development of Georgia increased from 45% to 53%.⁸⁹

The IRI survey showed the population's attitude towards elections and political parties. 32% of respondents considered the 2021 local municipal elections to be completely free and fair, while 25% pointed to some problems, although in the end, they rated the elections significantly as free and fair.⁹⁰ 54% fully or partially trusted the Central Election Commission.⁹¹ 23% said they did not trust political parties, while 53% had neither trust nor distrust in the parties.⁹² 31% thought that none of the political parties expressed their interests.⁹³ 71% of respondents think the country was moving towards more polarization.⁹⁴ 74% fully supported Georgia's accession to the European Union.⁹⁵

IX. FREEDOM HOUSE REPORT ON NATIONS IN TRANSIT

On April 20, Freedom House published the report "Nations in Transit – 2022".⁹⁶ The report assessed the democratization process in up to 27 post-communist states in Europe and Eurasia.⁹⁷ According to Freedom House, the index of democracy in Georgia has decreased compared to 2021.⁹⁸ With this indicator, Georgia belongs to the "hybrid regimes" in the "gray zone."⁹⁹

The deterioration of the Georgian Democracy Index was due to negative changes in several components. These components were: National Democratic Governance (reduced from 2.50 to 2.25),¹⁰⁰ Civil Society (reduced from 4.25 to 4.00)¹⁰¹, and independence of the Judiciary (deteriorated from 2.75 points to 2.50).¹⁰² According to Freedom House, the decline in the rate of National Democratic Governance was due to the annulment of the April 19 Agreement and the protracted political crisis; The decline in Civil Society scores was caused by a submissive

⁸⁶ "Poll Shows Georgian Attitudes on Economy, Democracy, COVID-19 Response", information portal Civil.ge, April 29, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/488106>, updated: 11.05.2022.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ „Public Opinion Survey Residents of Georgia“, International Republican Institute, March 2022, p. 20, available at: <https://bit.ly/3FGdjiB>, updated: 11.05.2022.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., p. 30.

⁹³ "IRI: 31% of the population thinks that no party expresses their interests", information portal Radio Tavisupleba, April 27, 2022, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31824038.html>, updated: 11.05.2022.

⁹⁴ Public Opinion Survey Residents of Georgia, International Republican Institute, March 2022, p. 45.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 80.

⁹⁶ A scale of 1 to 7 was used for the evaluation, where 7 meant the highest score.

See "Freedom House research - Nations in Transit: Georgia's Democracy Score Keeps Worsening", information portal Civil.ge, April 21, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/486947>, updated: 11.05.2022.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Decreased from 3.18 points to 3.07 points.

See "Nations in Transit: From Democratic Decline to Authoritarian Aggression", Freedom House, 2022, p. 22, available at: <https://bit.ly/37Ka9hk>, updated: 11.05.2022.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁰⁰ "Nations in Transit: From Democratic Decline to Authoritarian Aggression", Freedom House, 2022, p. 22.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² "Country: Georgia, 2022", official website of the Freedom House, available at: <https://bit.ly/3wpURGT>, updated: 11.05.2022.

environment for the formation of violent ultra-right groups responsible for the events of July 2021, while the Judiciary's Independence score has been reduced by non-implementation of democratic reforms, lengthy crises, and politicization of the justice system.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Ibid.