



ISFED

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR
FAIR ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRACY

2018 Presidential Election
Second Interim Report of Pre-Election Monitoring
(September 9 - 30)

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Table of Contents

I.	Introduction.....	2
II.	Key findings	2
III.	Recommendations	4
IV.	Corruption scandal.....	5
V.	Pressure on observer organizations and interference with their work.....	5
VI.	The election administration.....	7
	Individuals under disciplinary liability elected in PECs	7
	First sessions of PECs and the process of election of PEC leaders.....	7
	Possibly falsified signatures on the lists of supporters of presidential candidates	10
VII.	“Technical Candidates” in the Presidential Election.....	11
VIII.	Letter of the GNCC on political advertising.....	11
IX.	Physical confrontation on political grounds.....	12
X.	Possible vote buying.....	13
XI.	Violation of campaigning rules.....	13
	Campaigning by civil servants on social media during work hours	13
	Participation of religious organization in campaigning.....	15
XII.	Abuse of administrative resources	16
	Use of means of communication for electoral purposes.....	16
	Elements of campaigning in events funded by the budget.....	17
	Signs of mobilization of civil servants in election campaigning.....	17
XIII.	Interference with election campaign.....	18
XIV.	Damaging of campaign materials	20
XV.	Bookmaking regarding elections	21
XVI.	Monitoring mission and methodology.....	22

I. Introduction

The International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) has been conducting long-term pre-election monitoring of October 28, 2018 presidential election since August 1, 2018, with involvement of up to 70 long-term observers nationwide. The monitoring is supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Second interim report of the pre-election monitoring mostly covers the period of **September 9-30**, as well as events that began to unfold prior to September 9 and continued throughout and, in some cases, after the monitoring period.

II. Key findings

The election campaign became considerably active in September. Presidential candidates were actively meeting with voters nationwide.

In the reporting period ISFED identified **1 case of confrontation on political grounds; 1 case of possible vote buying; 12 instances of violation of campaigning rules; 9 facts of misuse of administrative resources; 8 instances of interference with campaigning; 14 cases of damaging of campaign materials.** An illegal initiative of a political party about bookmaking regarding elections was also detected.

During the reporting period, ISFED filed 17 complaints with the CEC, including 12 complaints against illegal campaigning by civil servants both through social media and by active actions; 3 complaints deal with misuse of administrative resources; 1 complaint concerns with participation of a religious organization in campaigning and 1 complaint is about bookmaking regarding elections proposed by a political party Girchi. ISFED also filed a complaint with the State Audit Office requesting a probe into a possible vote buying by Shalva Natelashvili in Kutaisi.

During the reporting period, secret recordings were released by media, which implicated acting and former high-level officials in possible corrupt deals and uncovered possible illegal scheme of financing of the ruling party for elections. These recording were a continuation of events unfolding around Iberia TV. Founder of Iberia and Omega Group, Zaza Okuashvili accused former and current government officials of harassing his businesses, extortion and other crimes. These recordings and accusations create reasonable suspicions about elite corruption and informal rule in the country, while the information uncovered about possible scheme of financing of the ruling party undermines transparency of political financing, casts a shadow on the political environment and public trust towards it. Under these circumstances, it is clear that the legislative framework of political financing and the existing monitoring mechanisms are not responsive to challenges that exist in the country.

Especially alarming trend is a wave of unethical statements and attempts of government officials and heads of administrative bodies involved in elections to discredit work of observer organizations. ISFED became a target of such attack by the chair of the Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC). The attacks on NGOs became large scale and coordinated after the critical statement made by 13 non-governmental organizations about the corruption scandal. The Chair of Parliament, the Minister of Justice, Georgian Dream MPs, Tbilisi Mayor and the presidential candidate endorsed by the Georgian Dream all made statements with the aim of discrediting the organizations. **Such coordinated attack on observer NGOs during the pre-election period amounts to pressure by the authorities and an attempt to limit activities of these organizations.** Baseless accusations made by high-level officials of the government against observer organizations go beyond the standards of healthy criticism and working communication. Statements of government officials are aimed at discrediting and harming reputation of observer NGOs, which is unacceptable and threatens democratic development of the country.

During the reporting period, ISFED detected instances of illegal campaigning in violation of requirements of the Election Code. After Salome Zourabishvili was officially endorsed by the Georgian Dream and her

sequential number was determined for the election, it became noticeable that large amount of civil servants engaged in campaigning in favor of Zourabishvili through their personal Facebook profiles, during working hours. Some civil servants express their support for Salome Zourabishvili directly, while others share posts that discredit opposition parties and candidates in parallel with expressing their support for Salome Zourabishvili. Some civil servants refrain from campaigning through Facebook during working hours and instead, their political activities take place after working hours. Such approach is welcome. Additionally, a representative of a religious organization made statements against Salome Zourabishvili, which amounts to violation of the campaigning rules. ISFED has filed complaints with the electoral administration in connection to each case of illegal canvassing.

During the reporting period, there were instances of misuse administrative resources in favor of the independent presidential candidate endorsed by the ruling party, Salome Zourabishvili. Means of communication funded by the local self-government budgets were used for pre-election purposes. In addition, local civil servants, teachers, employees of non-commercial (non-profit) legal entities were mobilized for meetings of the candidate with voters.

Instances of interference with election campaign were frequent during meetings of presidential candidates with voters. Such incidents mostly occurred during meetings of the independent candidate endorsed by the ruling party, Salome Zourabishvili and the candidate of the *United National Movement*, Grigol Vashadze. Supporters and activists of the *United National Movement* meet Salome Zourabishvili outside buildings where the candidate has meetings with voters and hold rallies against the background of insulting remarks and banners. In several cases, attendees of the meeting interrupted Salome Zourabishvili's speech. Attempts to disrupt meetings of Grigol Vashadze were also detected. As the election campaign became active, instances of damaging campaign materials of opposition candidates were found.

On September 28, the CEC finished registration of presidential candidates. According to final results, 25 candidates have been registered for the presidential election, including 19 nominated by political parties and 6 by initiative groups. Notably, qualified parties that are members of the united opposition *Power is in Unity* have registered five candidates for the presidential election, including four that have no declared electoral interest and instead, they aim to support the UNM candidate Grigol Vashadze by receiving benefits afforded to qualified parties under the electoral legislation. Presidential candidate of the European Georgia, Davit Bakradze is also supported by the so-called "technical candidate".

During the reporting period, precinct electoral commissions (PECs) were composed, first sessions were held and PEC leaders were elected. ISFED observers reported that at precincts where they attended the meetings, no serious incidents or infringements were found. There was a trend that PEC members knew in advance who would be elected as PEC chair, deputy chair and secretary. In some cases it was obvious that PEC members lacked competencies – often electoral documentations were filled out by representatives of district electoral commissions (DECs) instead of PEC members.

In the process of composition of precinct commissions by DECs, the CEC recommendation not to select individuals that had been subjected to disciplinary liability during previous elections, was disregarded by some DECs and individuals subjected to disciplinary liability in 2016-2017 were reappointed as PEC members. Individuals previously subjected to disciplinary liability are also among PEC members nominated by parties.

III. Recommendations

Government officials should:

- immediately stop harassment and attacks on non-governmental organizations. Instead of trying to discredit and harm reputation of observer organizations, they should treat civil society with respect characteristic of a democratic and pluralistic society.

Political parties and electoral subjects should:

- refrain from mobilizing their supporters to attend public meetings of opposing parties/candidates; prevent their supporters from interfering with meetings and campaign activities of other political subjects;
- avoid such forms of relationships with voters that create risks of vote buying;
- respect electoral legislation and prevent any illegal calls, promises and initiatives in the election campaign;
- urge their supporters not to damage campaign materials of their competitors.

Religious and charitable organizations should:

- abide by requirements of the Election Code and refrain from participating in election campaigning in favor of a party or a candidate.

Local self-government bodies should:

- prevent campaigning by civil servants during working hours;
- observe political neutrality and prevent abuse of local budgetary or human resources for advancing party interests;
- inform local civil servants about their rights and responsibilities during election period.

Law enforcement authorities should:

- investigate the possible corruption deal involving the illegal scheme of political party financing immediately and without bias.

IV. Corruption scandal

Following the statements made by the founders of Iberia TV in early September, in which they accused the authorities of offering to solve financial problems of the company in exchange for giving up Iberia TV, several scandalous recordings were released. These recordings contain possible elements of harassment of businesses of the founder of Iberia TV and Omega Group Zaza Okuashvili, corruption and informal rule.

In a recording released on September 17¹, possible interlocutors - founder of Omega Group Zaza Okuashvili, a shareholder of Tbilisi Tobacco Irakli Chubinashvili and businessman Vano Chkhartishvili are discussing the new scheme of distribution of tobacco market in Georgia. According to this plan, a cigarette distribution company will be created and 50% of revenues generated from the sale of cigarettes will allegedly be allocated to the *Georgian Dream* fund.

Another recording released on September 24² is a conversation possibly between Irakli Chubinashvili and Zaza Okuashvili, in which Chubinashvili is sharing with Zaza Okuashvili information about the illegal scheme of “the party” financing. In particular, Chubinashvili states that he pays 2.5 tetris to the ruling party from the sale of every cigarette pack. In the conversation Irakli Chubinashvili told Okuashvili that he has financed “the party” for elections three times already. Chubinashvili also states that the issue of “party” financing was controlled by “the minister”. The recording, in addition to signs of corruption, also reveals elements of illegal donations and illegal mobilization of finances for election purposes by the p/u *Georgian Dream*.

Contents of the audio recordings call effectiveness of the party financing legislation in the election system of Georgia into question. If the recordings are authentic and the facts provided in them are true, it means that relevant state institutions and the legislative framework are ineffective in dealing with mobilization and spending of illegal financial resources in politics. Illegal mobilization of financial resources by the ruling party in a special secret fund creates unhealthy political environment and jeopardizes right of citizens of Georgia to fair elections, which eventually undermines public trust towards political processes and parties.

In addition to these recordings, other recordings released on September 29-30 and an interview with Zaza Okuashvili aired by Rustavi 2 TV reveals information about other serious crimes, including elements of systemic corruption with involvement of high-level officials and state institutions. Contents of these recordings also indicate that public institutions are subjected to informal influences of certain individuals, which calls effectiveness of investigation into authenticity of the scandalous recordings and serious crimes revealed by them into question.

V. Pressure on observer organizations and interference with their work

During the pre-election period of the 2018 presidential election, attacks of high-level officials on civil society and in particular, on activities of observer organizations with baseless and unfounded accusations became a trend and reached previously unprecedented scale.

At first, attacks to discredit observer organizations came from heads of state entities involved in electoral processes, however this has recently grown into a coordinated attack on NGOs, and the Speaker of Parliament, the Minister of Justice, Georgian Dream MPs, Tbilisi Mayor and the presidential candidate endorsed by the Georgian Dream all made statements with the aim of discrediting the NGOs. **Such coordinated attack on observer organizations during a pre-election period amounts to pressure by the authorities and an attempt to limit work of these organizations. Statements made by the authorities and high-level officials of the ruling party with the aim of discrediting NGOs are categorically unacceptable and they threaten observers involved in the election process, since this prevents them from conducting effective monitoring and forces them to work under pressure. Representatives of the authorities should immediately stop attacking work of NGOs.**

¹ Scandalous recordings of Iberia and Omega Group case, Rustavi 2, September 17, 2018, <http://rustavi2.ge/ka/news/113741>

² Omega Group case and another scandalous recording, Rustavi 2, September 24, 2018, <http://rustavi2.ge/ka/news/114387>

First time ISFED became target of such attack was after it published the first interim report of pre-election monitoring. In the report published on September 13,³ the organization evaluated two decisions of the GNCC. The following day, GNCC Chair Kakha Bekauri held a press conference and attacked the organization due to the report. Bekauri's press conference was clearly aimed at discrediting the work of the organization. At the press conference held for attacking ISFED, the GNCC Chair voiced inconsistent, baseless and senseless accusations. Alongside a range of unfounded accusations made during the press conference and in the subsequently published press release, Bekauri addressed donors of ISFED and demanded that they reconsider funding of the organization. ISFED assesses that the discrediting statements of Kakha Bekauri amount to pressure and an attempt to hamper the work of the organization.⁴

Earlier on August 21, CEC Chair Tamar Zhvania criticized the report prepared by the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) and assessed it as "not serious" and "unprofessional". On August 24, during a meeting of the Inter-Agency Commission for Free and Fair Elections, Commission Chair Thea Tsulukiani attacked GYLA due to its report and accused the monitoring organization of not having a methodology.

Attack on NGOs intensified following a statement⁵ made by 13 organizations after the corruption deal was made public. During Archevani program aired on Rustavi 2 on October 2, Chair of Parliament Irakli Kobakhidze referred to the thirteen organizations as "not serious", "incompetent" and "shameless" and accused them of political bias.⁶ The following day, these accusations were repeated by Minister of Justice Tsulukiani, who suggested the NGOs to register as political parties.⁷ Similar evaluations were made by MPs from the ruling party, while on October 6 Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze accused NGOs of being biased.⁸ Independent presidential candidate endorsed by the Georgian Dream, Salome Zourabishvili also joined in with her critical remarks.⁹

These baseless accusations made by high-level officials about monitoring organizations go beyond standards of healthy criticism and working communication. Statements of government officials are aimed at discrediting and harming reputation of observer NGOs, which is unacceptable and threatens democratic development of the country.

Zugdidi

On September 22, independent presidential candidate endorsed by the Georgian Dream – Salome Zourabishvili was meeting voters in the hall of the Youth Palace in Zugdidi. Initially, ISFED long-term observer was not allowed to join the meeting. Someone pushed him near the entrance of the hall due to which he fell down and sustained a minor injury. Later the situation was defused by majoritarian MP Merab Kvaraia, who ensured that the observer attended the meeting.

Ozurgeti

On September 25, before the meeting of Salome Zourabishvili with voters began, as ISFED LTO was entering the hall at the House of Culture a stranger briefly stopped her to prevent her from entering the hall.

Baghdati

ISFED LTO, who was supposed to monitor initial meetings of PECs, was not allowed to monitor meetings of two precinct commissions. The observer arrived at the precinct according to the schedule provided to her by the district commission. The meeting at Baghdati Precinct #30 was scheduled at 13:00. The observer arrived at the precinct at 12:45 only to find that DEC and PEC members were absent. At 14:55, the observer contacted the DEC Secretary, Eleonora Lomsianidze and was informed that the schedule had been changed

³ 2018 presidential election – first interim report of the pre-election monitoring, ISFED, 13 September 2018, <http://www.isfed.ge/main/1409/geo/>

⁴ ISFED responds to the GNCC chair, ISFED, 15 September 2018, <http://www.isfed.ge/main/1411/geo/>

⁵ Informal rule has triggered crisis of democratic institutions, joint statement of 13 organizations, ISFED, 1 October 2018, <http://www.isfed.ge/main/1418/geo/>

⁶ Irakli Kobakhidze on civil society, Rustavi 2, 2 October 2018, <http://rustavi2.ge/ka/news/115128>

⁷ Tsulukiani: these 13 NGOs are actually political parties and we are ready to register them, Tabula, 3 October 2018, <http://tbl.ge/35wj>

⁸ Kakha Kaladze – statements of NGOs are biased and they do not reflect problems that actually exist in the election period, Channel 1, 6 October 2018, <https://bit.ly/2OK3SXi>

⁹ Salome Zourabishvili about NGOs, Channel 1, 5 October 2018, <https://bit.ly/2QBcehs>

and the meeting of the commission would take place at a later time. According to the timetable, ISFED observer intended to attend opening of the precinct commission #15 in Obcha village (the administrative building of Obcha), scheduled at 15:00. The observer arrived at 14:45 only to find that the meeting had already ended.

Martvili

On September 25, at 12:53, ISFED LTO addressed Martvili DEC Secretary with an application requesting a schedule of initial meetings of PECs. She also verbally informed the secretary that she needed the schedule to attend PEC meetings. The secretary responded that they had not yet prepared the schedule and said that she would later receive the information by e-mail. Despite this promise, the secretary did not provide the requested information to the observer. The observer was able to obtain the schedule of PEC meetings from a member of the DEC appointed by the *United National Movement*.

VI. The election administration

Individuals under disciplinary liability elected in PECs

ISFED checked whether PEC members appointed by DEC and parties included individuals subjected to disciplinary liability during elections in 2016-2017.

According to public information provided by the CEC and DEC, DEC elected a total of **398** members of precinct commissions that had been subjected to disciplinary liability in 2016 or 2017, including **247** members subjected to disciplinary liability during the parliamentary elections in 2016 and **151** during the local self-government elections in 2017.

For this presidential election, political parties appointed **128** commission members from among individuals subjected to disciplinary liability in 2016 and **272** from among individuals subjected to disciplinary liability in 2017. Most of these individuals have been appointed by the *Georgian Dream*.

First sessions of PECs and the process of election of PEC leaders

After PECs were staffed, their first sessions were held according to the rules and the timeframes prescribed by the legislation, for election of PEC chair, deputy chair and secretary.

ISFED observers monitored first sessions of **140** PECs in **56** districts. These meetings mostly took place in a peaceful environment and without any infringements that would call integrity of the process into question.

However, at several precincts observers found a trend of PEC members lacking adequate competencies and knowledge about electoral legislation and procedures, and DEC representatives were helping them administer the process. In addition, often it seemed to ISFED observers that PEC members knew in advance who was going to be elected as leaders of the PEC.

Baghdati

- On September 26, first session was held at Baghdati DEC #10. The meeting was opened by the oldest member of the commission. During the meeting Nino Partaladze, who was subjected to disciplinary liability in 2017, was nominated and elected by PEC members as the chair of the commission. The PEC also elected the deputy chair and the secretary. Minutes and other documents were filled in with the help of DEC members.
- The same day, at 14:00, first session was held at PEC #16 (Dimi village Public school #2 in Zeda Dimi). Before the meeting began, member of the commission Davit Janiashvili, who was later elected as the PEC chair, told DEC representative Liana Abuladze that there was a problem about deputy secretary. More specifically “he – Boris Chkhetia refuses to hold the office.” ISFED observer asked him how he knew in

advance who would be the deputy chair of the PEC and why he was agreeing this matter with DEC representatives. Janiashvili did not respond.

Aspindza

- Based on monitoring of first sessions of PECs #16 and 17 in Aspindza, it is clear that PEC members lacked competencies for conducting the meeting effectively, which is why the DEC members were instructing them about sequence of procedures. In addition, PEC members appointed by opposition parties lacked competencies to be fully involved in administration of election and to make independent decisions, without other members of the PEC influencing them.
- At Khertvisi PEC, before the meeting began Luiza Vacharadze (later elected as the secretary) was saying that she would not be able to serve as the secretary because she would have to leave the district due to her studies. The PEC Chair Inga Minashvili was discussing this issue with DEC members, whether or not a different member of the commission could have been elected as the secretary. Luiza agreed to the position of the secretary following a phone call with an unidentified individual, after she was convinced by the person on the phone that she was needed as the PEC secretary. Before she agreed, Vacharadze let Inga Minashvili talk to the person on the phone as well.

Chokhatauri

- On September 25, head of the UNM office in Chokhatauri provided ISFED observer with a list of individuals that, according to him, were going to be elected as PEC leaders. On September 26 and 27, ISFED observer attended and monitored initial PEC meetings at 6 precincts of Chokhatauri District. The observer found that at five precincts individuals on the list provided by the UNM were elected as PEC leaders.

At the first sessions of PECs there was a trend of commission members from the *European Georgia* not participating in voting for election of PEC leaders.

- Notably, at the precinct #6 of Gogolesubani, Eliza Sikharulidze who had previously been subjected to disciplinary liability during elections in 2017 was elected as the deputy chairperson. She has been appointed as PEC member by the *Georgian Dream*.
- At precinct #3 of Ianeuli, DEC-appointed member Tsira Kalandadze who is a spouse of the *Georgian Dream* coordinator was elected as PEC Secretary during the PEC meeting. In the same district, DEC-appointed member Natia Paichadze is a spouse of the mayor representative in village Ianeuli.
- Chair of the UNM organization in Chokhatauri Municipality provided ISFED LTO with a list of PEC members appointed by the DEC, who have violated the Resolution #157/2018 of the Central Election Commission of Georgia and requirements of para.13 of art.25 of the Election Code of Georgia – in particular, applications of these individuals for the competition are incomplete or inaccurate.

ISFED observer verified the report (at several precincts) about elections-related experience of PEC members. It was subsequently established that dates of experience of PEC members do not match the dates provided in their applications.

Ozurgeti

Before election of PEC chair at the precinct #58, PEC member Nazi Katamadze's behavior made it clear who would be elected. UNM representative Marina Shantadze refused to participate in election of the PEC leaders, which prompted PEC members and especially Nazi Katamadze who was later elected as the PEC Chair by other members of the PEC, to become aggressive towards her.

Vake

ISFED observer attended meetings of PECs at precincts #38, #35, #39 and #42. From the behavior of PEC members it seemed that they knew in advance who would be elected as the chair, the deputy chair and the secretary. Notably, elected PEC members lack competencies to maintain election documentation independently and DEC representatives were helping them administer procedures.

Saburtalo

ISFED observer attended meetings of PECs at precincts #71, #69 and #72. Due to behavior of PEC members it seemed that they knew in advance who would be elected as the chair, the deputy chair and the secretary. Notably, elected PEC members lack competencies to maintain election documentation independently and DEC representatives were helping them administer procedures.

Samgori

On September 26 and 27, ISFED observer attended meetings of the following PECs: #39, #40, #11, #12, #45, #50, #51, #58, #59. In the process of election of PEC leaders it was noticeable that PEC members knew in advance who to nominate and elect as the chair, the deputy chair and the secretary.

Kobuleti

On September 27, ISFED LTO attended first sessions of PECs #7, #8, #63 of Kobuleti. At each of these meetings there was a trend of PECs knowing in advance who to nominate and elect as the chair, the deputy chair and the secretary. Candidates were not supported by members of the UNM and the *European Georgia*.

On September 26, before holding of first meetings of PECs, UNM representatives Merab Tsintsabadze and Bondo Tedoradze provided ISFED LTO with the list of PEC members that, according to them, would be elected as chairs, deputy chairs and secretaries during first meetings of PECs, according to the *Georgian Dream* instructions. ISFED LTO verified this report and found out that from the list of 178 people provided by the UNM, 136 were elected as PEC secretaries, deputy secretaries and chairs.

Martvili

- On September 26, PEC #6 of Lemikave was scheduled to open at 11:30 but the meeting began 40 minutes late. PEC members arrived for the meeting only to find that the meeting was held in a different building (the administrative building of the village trustee). The meeting was attended by 11 members of the commission. UNM-appointed member of the commission refused to participate in the scheduled voting for election of the chair, the deputy chair and the secretary. He also proposed that all PEC members present identity documents before the meeting began, in order to prove their identity. The initiative was supported by the UNM representative who was monitoring opening of the meeting. DEC members were irritated by this proposal. They said that the law did not require PEC members to present their identity documents before the meeting. The UNM representatives were not allowed to implement this initiative. In connection to this fact, UNM representative prepared a complaint addressed to the PEC #6. In the complaint the UNM representative stated that the refusal of the DEC members did not allow him to establish identity of PEC members. As a result, he was unable to determine whether or not the individuals that had arrived for the meeting really were members of the commission.

The UNM representative was video recording the meeting. DEC member told him to abide by the five-minute rule and turn his camera off if he had been filming for more than five minutes. The UNM representative prepared a complaint stating that he was interrupted during video recording of the meeting. It turned out that the PEC secretary refused to register the complaint, which prompted the UNM representatives to file a complaint with the DEC over actions of the secretary of the PEC #6.

As a result of monitoring of four electoral precincts (#5, #6, #7, #34) in Martvili District ISFED observer found that commission members knew in advance who would be elected as PEC chair, deputy chair and secretary. Additionally, it was obvious that elected PEC members lacked competencies. In fact, DEC representatives were filling out documentation instead of PEC secretaries. It was clear that they were unable to complete this assignment independently. This is also true for PEC chairs, who were essentially repeating remarks of DEC representatives in order to open the session.

The UNM followed one strategy – in particular, they refused to participate in voting and they demanded that PEC members present their identity documents before the voting began. Opening of precincts #6, #7 and #34 was at least half hour late, due to DEC members.

In every commission PEC members were trying to find the thirteenth member of the commission but in vain. Eventually, they discovered that as a result of amendments made to the Election Code in 2017, PECs have 12 members.

Lanchkhuti

Representative of the regional organization of the UNM in Lanckhuti, Givi Tsintsadze informed ISFED LTO that he had an audio recording proving that elected PEC members support the *Georgian Dream*. According to these recordings, Givi Tsintsadze, posing as a representative of the *Georgian Dream*, contacted the following three individuals– Giga Nikolaishvili, Valerian Butsi and Natia Khishtovani. In the first recording, Tsintsadze asks whether a curator had called him from the *Georgian Dream* headquarters and demanded that he go to the district and submit an application for the position of an independent member. Unidentified person confirms that he had received such call. In another recording, Tsintsadze asked another person whether or not he was contacted from the “[Georgian] Dream” Headquarters, to which the person replied – “I don’t know”. Tsintsadze repeated his question “*did Lolita Urushadze contact you?*” to which Tsintsadze received the same answer. In the third recording a woman (whose voice is barely audible) responded to Tsintsadze that she has nothing to do with the party and that she has always been an independent member of the PEC elected by the district commission.

ISFED observer found out that the audio recordings had been made on September 2. The UNM representative did not respond as to why the recordings were not made public immediately after they were made. The observer contacted the foregoing individuals, of whom Giga Nikolaishvili (elected member of PEC #16 in 2012-2016) refused to comment, Valerian Butsi (PEC #28 member in 2016-2017) stated: “*Tsintsadze has edited the recordings in a way that suits his needs. He was asking a completely different question. I was always an independent candidate.*” As to Natia Khishtovani (member of PEC #17 since 2006), she categorically rejected the allegation about having ties with the *Georgian Dream* but confirmed that she has known Lolita Urushadze for a long time because she is her child’s teacher.

Gori

At electoral precincts within Gori District #32, PEC members appointed by the *Alliance of Patriots of Georgia* have a problem attending PEC meetings and possibly working. This was reported to ISFED by DEC Chair Malkhaz Maruashvili. The problem emerged due to the fact that the party mixed up the list of members to be appointed at precincts and nominated members at wrong precincts instead of their preferred precincts. As a result, commission members wonder why they should attend a PEC meeting in the village that is not a place of their choice.

Possibly falsified signatures on the lists of supporters of presidential candidates

It was reported by the Central Election Commission that personal information and signature of the Georgian PM was on the list of supporters of the presidential candidate submitted by p/u *Movement for the People*. The signature on supporter’s form was considerably different from the publicly known signature of the PM.¹⁰ An individual citizen also reported inaccuracy on the list of supporters to the CEC. In particular, he suspected that his personal information was used without his consent and demanded a probe. Additionally, a DEC member applied to the CEC about possibly falsified signatures on the lists of supporters of the presidential candidate submitted by the p/u *National Democratic Party*. The documents were referred to the prosecution service for further actions.

After this fact was made public, leaders of the p/u *Movement for the People* accused the CEC and the security service of attacking the party. Chair of the *Christian Conservative Party of Georgia* Shota Malashkhia alleged that signatures of supports submitted by them was more than what they had originally submitted to the CEC. In particular, instead of 986 pages, after the lists were unsealed it was found that signatures of supporters were 26 pages or up to 700 signatures more than the original submission.¹¹

¹⁰ Statement about signatures on the lists of supporters, CEC, 18 September 2018, <https://bit.ly/2OHdmCG>

¹¹ The united opposition talks about excessive signatures, Rustavi 2, 24 September 2018, <http://rustavi2.ge/ka/news/114365>

VII. “Technical Candidates” in the Presidential Election

The alliance of 10 opposition political parties – *Power is in Unity* is represented by Grigol Vashadze in the presidential election. He was registered as a presidential candidate after being nominated by the *United National Movement*. However, four other parties that are members of the alliance have also nominated candidates. These candidates include: Zviad Baghdavadze (Civil Platform – New Georgia), Zviad Iashvili (National Democratic Party), Zviad Mekhatishvili (Christian Conservative Party of Georgia) and Mikheil Antadze (Movement for the People). All four candidates have been nominated by qualified electoral subjects, just like the UNM. According to the alliance of opposition parties, this is exactly why the so-called “technical candidates” have been nominated.

Under art.43 of the Election Code of Georgia, to ensure their representation at DEC and PECs on Election Day, qualified electoral subjects will receive GEL 100 for each electoral precinct and GEL 150 for each electoral district. In this way, a candidate of *Power is in Unity* will be able to have five representatives in precincts and districts, supported with the state funding. In total, the association will receive GEL 500 for each electoral precinct and GEL 750 for each electoral district, which is five times more than any other qualified candidate.

The Election Code also envisages information support to election campaigning of qualified electoral subjects. Art.51 of the Code obligates national broadcasters, Ajara TV and Radio of the Public Broadcaster and community broadcasters to allocate airtime for free political advertising to qualified electoral subjects equally and in a non-discriminatory manner, no later than from the 50th day before polling until the polling day. This essentially means that the *Power is in Unity* will receive five times more airtime for free advertising than any other qualified candidate.

While the actions of the movement *Power is in Unity* do not contradict the Georgian legislation, they do not serve the purpose of making the election process healthier. Election contestants include candidates that aim to create favorable conditions for other candidate, receive financial resources from the State and benefit from privileges afforded to qualified subjects by the legislation, instead of gaining votes. This creates unfair and unequal conditions for other presidential candidates.

Similarly, ISFED learned that presidential candidate of the *European Georgia*, Davit Bakradze is also using support of the so-called “technical candidate”. In this case, p/u *Movement for Free Georgia* has registered a candidate Irakli Giorgadze for the presidential election. *Movement for Free Georgia* is also a qualified electoral subject and privileges afforded to it by the legislation are used in favor of Davit Bakradze’s campaign.

VIII. Letter of the GNCC on political advertising

On September 25, Georgian National Communications Commission Chair sent another letter to broadcasters and demanded that they stop airing three videos of political advertisement against Salome Zourabishvili.

The commission demanded that the broadcasters stop airing the video for several reasons.¹²

One video was using a fragment from a TV program *Reaction* where the program host Inga Grigolia is asking Salome Zourabishvili a question. According to the GNCC, participation of the program host in the election advertisement violates the Law of Georgia on Broadcasting. More specifically, para.5 of art.63 of the Law prohibits participation of hosts or journalists of news programs, social/political and pre-election programs in any type of advertisement. Therefore, the advertisement using a fragment from the TV program *Reaction* with appearance of Inga Grigolia is improper advertisement.

¹² The GNCC demands that TV broadcasters stop airing three videos against Salome Zourabishvili, On.ge, 26 September 2018, <http://go.on.ge/u2v>

In another video Zourabishvili is called a traitor, which in GNCC's view "violates moral norms and sullies a physical person." According to the Commission, the video is unethical and therefore, it is an improper advertisement, airing of which is prohibited by para.2 of art.63 of the Law on Broadcasting.

As to the third video, according to the GNCC chair, it contains indecent expression and contradicts para.4 of art.56 of the Law of Georgia on Broadcasting.

Para.z8 of art.2 of the Election Code of Georgia defines campaigning as appeal to voters in favor of **or against** an electoral subject/candidate, as well as any public action facilitating or **impeding** its election and/or containing signs of election campaign. This means that appeals and/or actions of electoral subjects against their opponents are a legitimate action under the Election Code of Georgia.

During the period of pre-election campaign (canvassing), political party, candidate for electoral subject, an electoral subject have the right to create appeals, statements, signboards, papers, photos and other materials. The law prohibits interference with dissemination of these materials.

The obligation imposed by the GNCC on broadcasters not to air the election videos for being unethical and indecent does not pursue any of the legitimate goals provided in the Law on Broadcasting or in the Election Code.

For political advertising the Election Code determines contents of campaigning prohibited within the election campaign and provides an exhaustive list in this regard. More specifically, the election program may not contain propaganda for war or violence, appeal for change or overthrow of the existing state and social order by violence, for violation of the territorial integrity of Georgia, for national stifle and enmity, or for religious or ethnic confrontation.

Even if the GNCC Chair cites a higher standard provided in the Election Code and relies on the Law of Georgia on Broadcasting for restriction of advertisement, the commission is not authorized to react on violations of para.4 of art.56 of the Law of Georgia on Broadcasting. If an individual finds violation of para.4 of art.56 of the Law on Broadcasting, s/he may apply to the self-regulation mechanism of the broadcaster or to court. This follows from art.59¹ of the Code and the November 10, 2009 decision of the Constitutional Court of Georgia.¹³

In light of this, the letter sent by the GNCC chair to broadcasters, which is not a legal act in and of itself, and ordering broadcasters to stop airing the three political campaign videos, places disproportionate limitations on broadcaster's freedom of expression.

IX. Physical confrontation on political grounds

Akhalkalaki

On September 27, it was reported that Akhalkalaki DEC Chair Hasmik Marangozian engaged in a physical confrontation with a member of the DEC, Teona Chalidze. The latter has been appointed as the DEC member by the *United National Movement* party.

ISFED LTO contacted the DEC chair and deputy chair first, who categorically rejected the report of confrontation. Later the observer interviewed Teona Chalidze, who recalled details of the incident and stated that the DEC Chair insulted her verbally and physically.

On September 27, at 10:00, Teona Chalidze arrived at the DEC during working hours, together with the UNM representative in Akhalkalaki District, Artur Mkoyan. She sat in the room where usually DEC members work. The DEC chair and deputy chair were there. The DEC chair Hasmik Marangozian told Teona Chalidze to leave the room because it was his personal office. Chalidze demanded that the chair provide a space for her to

¹³ Citizens of Georgia – Giorgi Kipiani and Avtandil Ungiadze v Parliament of Georgia, <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/1129248?publication=0>

work. The DEC chair provided a space for her in the storage room. In a few minutes Marangozian told Chalidze that they were keeping personal belongings and money of other DEC members in the room and warned her not to steal anything. In addition, she spoke unethically to Artur Mkoyan in Armenian language. Teona Chalidze moved to the room where other DEC members were sitting and tried to continue working. According to Chalidze, Hasmik Marangozian told DEC members in Armenian that Artur Mkoyan is a thief and they need to be careful with him.

Teona Chalidze criticized Hasmik Marangozian for not informing her about opening of electoral precincts and for providing her with inaccurate information. According to her, she expected the precincts to open on September 28, while precincts of Akhalkalaki District began to open on September 26. She also demanded that they continued communication in Georgian language and filed an application requesting that meetings of the DEC be held in Georgian. Marangozian responded that he had no obligation to communicate with her in Georgian and said that she should speak Russian and Armenian languages.

During the argument he came at Chalidze and expelled her from the room by using physical force. Chalidze called the police from the reception area of the DEC building. She was taken to Akhalkalaki Police where she was interviewed by the deputy chief of the regional police Givi Sikharulidze.¹⁴ According to Chalidze, he had different firearms lying on his table and he was trying to intimidate her with these firearms. Chalidze also called the General Inspection and reported the incident. At the end of the day, Chalidze was taken to Akhaltsikhe for forensic examination.

X. Possible vote buying

Kutaisi

On September 21, presidential candidate of p/u *Labor Party of Georgia*, Shalva Natelashvili had a campaign meeting with voters in Gelati, where he presented his electoral platform.¹⁵ He congratulated the locals for Gelatoba Festival. According to ISFED LTO the presidential candidate gave GEL 150 to beggars outside the church indirectly, with the help of the party activist.

ISFED filed a complaint with the State Audit Office requesting a probe into provision of money to voters because this may amount to vote buying. Under art.25⁵ of the organic law of Georgia on Political Associations of Citizens, a party is prohibited from providing money, gifts or other material or non-material possessions to citizens of Georgia personally or through its candidates, representatives or other persons.

XI. Violation of campaigning rules

Campaigning by civil servants on social media during work hours

During the election campaign ISFED detected a number of instances of civil servants publishing posts on social media in support of presidential candidate during working hours, which amounts to violation of the rule of participation in campaigning and possibly misuse of administrative resources. It should be noted that a memorandum of understanding has been signed between the CEC, the Inter-Agency Commission for Free and Fair Elections and local non-governmental organizations, according to which campaigning through a personal social media page using communication means and other equipment funded by the state/local budget amounts to abuse of administrative resources. At this stage, ISFED has filed 11 complaints with the CEC over violation of campaigning rules during working hours by civil servants and possible misuse of administrative resources.

¹⁴ See the video released by Chalidze about the interview with deputy chief of the regional police department: <https://www.facebook.com/teona.chalidze/videos/1972076429480414/>

¹⁵ Shalva Natelashvili congratulated voters on the Birth of the Virgin Mary from Gelati, Channel 1, 21 September 2018, <https://1tv.ge/video/shalva-natelashvirma-ghvtismshobloba-amomrchevels-gelatidan-miuloca/>

After Salome Zourabishvili was officially endorsed by the *Georgian Dream* and her sequential number was determined for the election, it became noticeable that large number of civil servants engaged in campaigning in favor of Zourabishvili through their personal Facebook profiles, during working hours. Some civil servants express their support for Salome Zourabishvili directly, while others share posts that discredit opposition parties and candidates in parallel with expressing their support for Salome Zourabishvili. Some civil servants refrain from campaigning through Facebook during working hours and instead, their political activities take place after working hours. This approach is welcome by ISFED.

Subparagraph “z8” of art.2 of the Election Code of Georgia defines campaigning as: “appeal to voters in favor of or against an electoral subject/candidate, as well as any public action facilitating or impeding its election and/or containing signs of election campaign, including the participation in organization/conduct of pre-electoral events, preservation or dissemination of election materials, work on the list of supporters, presence in the representations of political parties.”

Pursuant to para.4“h” of art.45 of the Election Code of Georgia, public officers of state authorities and local self-government bodies during normal business hours and/or when they are directly performing their duties, are prohibited from conducting and participating in election campaigning.

The limitation placed on the right of civil servants to conduct and participate in election campaigning is based on the principle provided in the Law of Georgia on Civil Service, which obligates civil servants to observe the principle of impartiality and political neutrality. Civil servants are prohibited from using their official status to advance party (political) goals and/or interests, to participate in election campaigning during working hours and/or when performing official duties. In addition, based on the OSCE Copenhagen Document, which underlines the need to draw the line between State and political party, party activities should not be mixed with activities of the state.

Campaigning through social media may also contain elements of pressure. ISFED found that representatives of p/u *Georgian Dream* in Vake were summoning activists and demanding that they like and share Facebook pages that contain discriminating photos and posts about opposition parties and opposition presidential candidates. In an interview with ISFED, one of the activists of the Georgian dream stated that if anyone refuses to like and share such Facebook pages, they would have problems at work, while those who are unemployed will not receive help in finding a job.

Borjomi

On September 10, during working hours, Head of Borjomi Municipality Cleaning and Improvement Services Davit Zaalashvili published on his personal Facebook page electoral sequence number of presidential candidate Salome Zourabishvili and information about her meetings with voters.

Gori

On September 17, during working hours, Head of the Office of Gori Municipality Sakrebulo Zakaria Naskidashvili published on his personal Facebook page information about a campaign meeting of presidential candidate Salome Zourabishvili.

Keda

On September 19, during working hours, deputy mayor of Keda Municipality Guram Beridze published on his personal Facebook page electoral sequence number of presidential candidate Salome Zourabishvili.

Kobuleti

On September 17, Kobuleti Deputy Mayor Davit Veruladze published a video of a campaign meeting of presidential candidate Salome Zourabishvili on his personal Facebook page.

Dedoplistskaro

On September 10 and 17, during working hours, head of the secondary structural unit of Dedoplistskaro Municipality – division of organization and clerical work, Nino Piroshmanashvili posted on her personal

Facebook page electoral sequence number of presidential candidate Salome Zourabishvili and information about her campaign meetings.

Kvareli

On September 11, during working hours, employee of the division of coordination of representatives of the mayor's office in Kvareli Municipality, Givi Chakhnashvili posted on his personal Facebook page electoral sequence number of presidential candidate Salome Zourabishvili and a status update "Salome Zourabishvili for president."

Khoni

On September 11, during working hours, head of Khoni Municipality Infrastructural Office Iliia Kuparadze posted on his personal Facebook page electoral sequence number of presidential candidate Salome Zourabishvili and a status update "Salome Zourabishvili for president."

Gardabani

On September 11, during working hours, Deputy Mayor of Gardabani Revaz Egadze published on his personal Facebook page electoral sequence number of presidential candidate Salome Zourabishvili and a status update "Salome Zourabishvili for president."

Zugdidi

On September 11, during working hours, Deputy Mayor of Zugdidi Municipality Maizer Nanava published on his Facebook page electoral sequence number of presidential candidate Salome Zourabishvili and a status update "Salome Zourabishvili for president."

Gurjaani

On September 17, head of the division for coordination of mayor's representatives at the administrative office of Gurjaani Municipality City Hall Levan Tsintsalashvili published on his personal Facebook page electoral sequence number of presidential candidate Salome Zourabishvili and a status update: "Salome Zourabishvili for president."

Telavi

On September 17, head of the division for coordination of work of mayor's representatives in Telavi Municipality, Vazha Leshkasheli published on his personal Facebook page electoral sequence number of the presidential candidate Salome Zourabishvili and photos of her campaign meeting.

Participation of religious organization in campaigning

On September 17, in a report aired by Rustavi 2 TV, Bishop of Chkondidi His Holiness Petre made political appeals during his sermon against presidential candidate Salome Zourabishvili, which contained elements of campaigning.¹⁶

According to His Holiness Petre, "... the French lady with her French way of thinking will bring us no good and I am convinced that God will not allow God to get angry with Georgian people, Georgian voters and Georgian nation, in order for them to make the right choice. I want to believe that like they refused in France to support the Kremlin-backed presidential lady and the French people told her no, similarly the Georgian people will say no to the evil deed plotted against Georgia..."

Following the sermon, in an interview with reporters the bishop made the following statement: "it is a vile thing to say that Georgia started war on the Georgian territory and of course this is either ignorance about the Georgian church and its history and disrespect, or an intentional evil, and I believe and I think and I want

¹⁶ His Holiness Petre versus the authorities and Salome Zourabishvili, Rustavi 2, 17 September 2018, <http://rustavi2.ge/ka/news/113769>

to believe that like the French people refused to support the Kremlin-backed presidential lady in France and told her no, similarly the Georgian nation will say not to the evil deed plotted against Georgia.”

The statement of the Bishop of Chkondidi amounts to election campaigning, and such expression of opinion about a presidential candidate violates the rule prescribed by the law about participation in election campaign. Based on para.4”g” of art.45 of the Election Code of Georgia, religious organizations are prohibited from conducting and participating in election campaigning (canvassing).

Bishop of Chkondidi His Holiness Petre Tsaava is a member of the Holy Synod of the Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church. According to the Constitutional Agreement between State of Georgia and Georgian Apostolic Autocephaly Orthodox Church, the Holy Synod represents the Church without any special authorization. This means that a statement made by the Bishop within his status and powers should be viewed as a position of a religious organization because he represents the Holy Synod.¹⁷

Public speeches made by leaders of religious organizations in any form, including as a sermon, entails communication with voters and amounts to a public action, especially when it is widely covered by media. Public actions of the bishop that represents the Georgian Apostolic Autocephaly Orthodox Church should be viewed as political campaigning by religious organization, which is prohibited by the Election Code.

To ensure secular governance of the state, it is important to observe the principle of keeping a distance between the state and the church. Representatives of the Georgian Apostolic Autocephaly Orthodox Church as well as other religious organizations should refrain from election campaigning. The purpose of the foregoing norm is to ensure independence of the electoral process and distance it from religion, in order for each individual citizen to be able to express his/her own free will, without being influenced by someone.

XII. Abuse of administrative resources

Use of means of communication for electoral purposes

Tbilisi

On September 27, at the Heroes Square, Tbilisi Mayor Kakha Kaladze laid a wreath on the memorial of heroes that died fighting for the territorial integrity of Georgia. Chair of Parliament Irakli Kobakhidze, other MPs and independent presidential candidate endorsed by the *Georgian Dream* – Salome Zourabishvili also participated in the wreath laying ceremony. The information and photos from the ceremony were published on the official Facebook page¹⁸ and official website of Tbilisi City Hall.¹⁹

Publishing of information about activities of the presidential candidate on the official Facebook page and official website of Tbilisi City Hall violated art.48 of the Election Code of Georgia prohibiting the abuse of administrative resources in the election campaign process in favor of a political party or a candidate for electoral subject. More specifically, among other things, *it is prohibited to use means of communication, information services, and other kinds of equipment designated for state authorities and local self-government bodies and for organizations funded from the State Budget of Georgia.*

Tkibuli

On September 19, information about campaign meetings of the independent candidate endorsed by the *Georgian Dream*, Salome Zourabishvili was published on the website of Tkibuli Information Center Info-

¹⁷ See members of the Holy Synod of the Georgian Apostolic Autocephaly Orthodox Church: <http://patriarchate.ge/geo/wmindasinodi/wevrebi/>

¹⁸ See the material published on the official Facebook page of Tbilisi City Hall: <https://bit.ly/2y6ljrI>

¹⁹ Kakha Kaladze paid respects to heroes that died in the war of Abkhazia, Tbilisi City Hall, 27 September 2018, <http://tbilisi.gov.ge/news/6096>

Tkibuli.²⁰ Publishing of the information about campaign meetings of the presidential candidate on the website of the Information Center Info-Tkibuli violated art.48 of the organic law of Georgia – the Election Code.

Information Center Info-Tkibuli receives funding from the local budget. Art.16 of Resolution #16 of Tkibuli Municipality Sakrebulo, under which the program budget of Tkibuli Municipality for 2018 was approved, allocates funding for the non-profit (non-commercial) legal entity Information Center. Notably, the Information Center was created in May 2015, in order to ensure transparency of the work of Tkibuli Municipality Gamgeoba, Sakrebulo and its structural entities and to cover problematic issues. The website qualifies as means of communication that receives direct funding from the local budget.

Elements of campaigning in events funded by the budget

Chkhorotsku

On September 19, news agency Livepress reported that opening of the kindergarten in Kirtski village of Chkhorotsku Municipality was celebrated with a cake that had an image of the logo of the *Georgian Dream* on it. According to the principal of the kindergarten Mimoza Damenia, they put the logo of the *Georgian Dream* on the cake in order to show their respect for the authorities.²¹

Use of the logo of p/u *Georgian Dream* at the opening of the kindergarten violated art.45 of the organic law of Georgia – the Election Code, which prohibits election campaigning by the organizer at any event/presentation funded from the State Budget of Georgia/the budget of local self-governing unit. Such action will be considered misuse of administrative resources.

Signs of mobilization of civil servants in election campaigning

Keda

On September 23, a meeting held within the election campaign of independent candidate endorsed by the *Georgian Dream*, Salome Zourabishvili was attended mostly by civil servants, alongside *Georgian Dream* activists. In particular, all employees of the office of Keda Sakrebulo, Gamgeoba office, the department of culture and education, representatives of the mayor in communities, employees of the kindergartens association, employees of the House of Culture and public school teachers were all taken to the meeting in minibuses, in an organized manner. The meeting was held during weekend.

Ozurgeti

On September 25, at 12:00, at the House of Culture of Daba Ureki, independent presidential candidate endorsed by the *Georgian Dream*, Salome Zourabishvili had a campaign meeting with voters. The meeting was attended by the Governor of Guria, members of Ozurgeti Sakrebulo and civil servants. ISFED LTO reported that civil servants attending the meeting had taken one-day leave from work. Schoolteachers had also been mobilized for the meeting. In an interview with the observer, one of the teachers stated that she also works at the *Georgian Dream* campaign office and they often take her to attend such meetings.

Chkhorotsku

On September 30, at 15:00, independent presidential candidate endorsed by the *Georgian Dream*, Salome Zourabishvili had a campaign meeting with voters at the House of Culture of Chkhorotsku Municipality. The meeting was attended by employees of the City Hall of Chkhorotsku Municipality and teachers, alongside local population.

Samtredia

²⁰ Presidential candidate Salome Zourabishvili in Tkibuli, info – Tkibuli, 19 September 2018, <https://bit.ly/2xukyIJ>

²¹ Georgian Dream – cake in a kindergarten, Livepress, 19 September 2018, <https://bit.ly/2OJPLBI>

On September 13, independent presidential candidate endorsed by the *Georgian Dream*, Salome Zourabishvili had a campaign meeting with voters. In addition to voters the meeting was also attended by Imereti Governor, Mayor of Samtredia and their deputies, members of Sakrebulo, employees of the non-profit (non-commercial) legal entity Association of Preschool Education, schoolteachers and employees of LTD Railway. ISFED observer checked whether employees of non-profit (non-commercial) legal entities had taken a leave of absence in order to attend the meeting and found that they had taken one-day leave.

Tkibuli

On September 19, at 12:00, independent presidential candidate endorsed by the *Georgian Dream*, Salome Zourabishvili had a campaign meeting with population of Tkibuli Municipality at the House of Culture of Tkibuli. Alongside voters the meeting was also attended by the mayor, deputy mayor and Sakrebulo chair of Tkibuli Municipality, as well as employees of different non-profit (non-commercial) legal entities. The meeting was attended by deputy mayor of Tkibuli Sophio Bochorishvili and assistant of Tkibuli Municipality Sakrebulo Chair, Giorgi Jinjikhadze.²² Participation of civil servants in the campaign meeting of the presidential candidate violated the rule of participation in campaigning prescribed by the law. ISFED has found that Giorgi Jinjikhidze, assistant of Sakrebulo Chair, and Deputy Mayor Sophio Bochorishvili were not on a leave of absence.²³

Kutaisi

On September 12, employees of Kutaisi Municipality, kindergartens and other non-profit (non-commercial) legal entities were mobilized for a meeting of Salome Zourabishvili with voters in the building of Lado Meskhishvili Theatre.

XIII. Interference with election campaign

Batumi

On September 24, at Batumi Music School, independent presidential candidate endorsed by the *Georgian Dream*, Salome Zourabishvili held a meeting with voters. As the candidate was making a speech, a person from the audience, Aslan Vashakmadze yelled at her that Salome Zourabishvili should not become a president of Georgia. The person was subsequently expelled from the hall by Zourabishvili's supporters. Later Aslan Vashakmadze informed reporters that he does not represent any party and that he disapproves of the statements of presidential candidate Salome Zourabishvili about the war between Russia and Georgia.

Borjomi

On September 17, the presidential candidate of the UNM and the *Power is in Unity*, Giorgi Vashadze was meeting with voters in Kvibisi Community within the election campaign. The meeting was attended by an activist of p/u *Georgian Dream* and an employee of the non-profit (non-commercial) legal entity "Borjomi Central Historic Park" Levan Bliadze. From the very beginning, Bliadze was trying to disrupt the event by using rhetoric and insulting words. He was accusing the presidential candidate of deception and of lying to the population. There was also a minor clash. Locals and individuals accompanying Vashadze took Levan Bliadze outside of the meeting venue and the incident was eliminated.

Kareli

According to representatives of the *United National Movement*, presidential candidate Grigol Vashadze was visiting Kareli on September 13. He was scheduled to meet with voters in a square in the central district of Kareli but the road to the square was closed because of some heavy equipment stationed in the area. The UNM members state that they had sent a letter to the municipality ahead of time, requesting permission for holding a meeting in the square, but Kareli City Hall informed them that due to road rehabilitation works going on in Kareli, the heavy equipment had been placed in the area and it was impossible to remove it.

²² See audio recording of the meeting: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aln-THNA60I>

Presidential candidate of the united opposition was forced to relocate his meeting. Grigol Vashadze evaluates the incident as interference with his election campaign.

First deputy mayor Nugzar Dabrundashvili cited the Law of Georgia on Assemblies and Manifestations and said that written notice about organizing and holding an assembly or manifestation should be submitted to the executive body of local self-government no later than 5 days before the event. The UNM members notified the city hall only one day before the meeting, which made it impossible to remove the equipment on time.

Kutaisi

On September 12, at Lado Meskhishvili State Theatre of Kutaisi, the independent presidential candidate endorsed by the *Georgian Dream*, Salome Zourabishvili had a meeting with voters.

Salome Zourabishvili could not enter the building from the central entrance because activists of the movement *Power is in Unity* were staging a protest, demanding to be let inside the building to attend the meeting and ask questions to the presidential candidate, including the question about why Zourabishvili announced that Georgia started the war in 2008. Activists were especially aggressive and they were violently trying to get inside the building. Activists of the *Georgian Dream* and security officers prevented them from entering the building.

After the meeting ended, protesters became active again. They were standing by the entrance of the theatre, waiting for the meeting to be over. People that exited the building after the meeting were called “slaves” by protesters, which led to a physical and verbal confrontation between meeting participants and activists.

Lanchkhuti

On September 25, at 15:10, the independent presidential candidate endorsed by the *Georgian Dream*, Salome Zourabishvili had a meeting with voters at the Center of Culture of Lanchkhuti. As she was exiting the building after the meeting, she was met by activists of the *United National Movement*, whistling and holding banners that said “Not a single vote for the traitor!” There were no physical clashes at the scene.

Kobuleti

On September 24, after finishing her meeting with voters at Kobuleti House of Culture the independent presidential candidate endorsed by the *Georgian Dream*, Salome Zourabishvili was met by leaders of the UNM campaign office in Kobuleti outside the Culture House, they were shouting and holding protest banners. To avoid a confrontation, law enforcement officers did not let the protesters near the candidate.

Zugdidi

On September 22, as the independent presidential candidate endorsed by the *Georgian Dream*, Salome Zourabishvili was meeting with voters at the Youth Palace of Zugdidi, her speech was interrupted by the UNM representative Maia Kalandia. She was trying to disrupt the meeting by shouting. Supporters of Salome Zourabishvili in the audience were trying to cover her shouts by clapping.

Batumi

According to the schedule of electoral activities of the CEC, local self-government bodies were required to install the display stands for placement of campaign materials before September 11. However, the City Hall of Batumi did not install such display stands on the territory of Batumi until September 17. Mayor of Batumi Municipality Lasha Komakhidze stated on TV that he thought the display stands had already been installed.

Batumi Sakrebulo had made the decision about designation of places for installment of display stands before the deadline prescribed by the law but the City Hall failed to ensure its timely enforcement. According to the lawyer of Batumi DEC, Suliko Shventidze the law does not obligate the self-government to install the display stands. Eventually, the display stands were installed in special designated areas on September 18, after the Public Broadcaster of Ajara actively covered this issue.

XIV. Damaging of campaign materials

Chkhorotsku

UNM activist Oto Shengelaia informed ISFED observer that in Chigha village campaign posters of the presidential candidate of the political union *Power is in Unity*, Grigol Vashadze were found to had been torn off the day after they were put up. There are no witnesses.

Marneuli

Chair of the local organization of the UNM in Marneuli, Agil Mustapaev informed ISFED observer that many of the posters that they put up in Marneuli have been torn off.

Gldani

According to the UNM representative, Irma Jobava damaging of campaign materials of their candidate Grigol Vashadze have become frequent in Gldani. She states that they have found the posters torn off but they have not seen who did this.

Khoni

In the city of Khoni Municipality and in nearby villages, posters of the *European Georgia* and the UNM presidential candidates mostly put up on trees have been damaged in several areas. However, the office of the UNM organization in Khoni has not accused any particular party in connection to this fact because according to the head of the campaign office Mamuka (Beniamen) Tkabladze, the posters could have been damaged by wind.

He also stated that several days ago in the morning they found that a poster of the *European Georgia* presidential candidate had been covered up by spray paint. They immediately notified representatives of the *European Georgia* campaign office, in order for this fact not to cause different types of suspicions.

Head of the campaign office of the *European Georgia* in Khoni, Davit Chavchanidze stated that they have not reported this fact but they think that covering up of the poster was intentional.

Khashuri

Campaign posters of the UNM presidential candidate Grigol Vashadze are damaged and torn off in several areas in Khashuri, however UNM campaign office in Khashuri has not reported this fact to the DEC.

Similar fact was detected by ISFED coordinator, involving campaign posters of the *European Georgia* presidential candidate Davit Bakradze. However, the party has not reported this fact to the electoral administration.

Sagarejo

On September 18, UNM member Garsevan Bukhnikashvili informed ISFED observer that posters put up by them were damaged by a person with disability residing in Sagarejo.

Gardabani

According to the UNM representative, Akip Ismailov majority of posters of the UNM candidate Grigol Vashadze have been torn off.

Lagodekhi

On September 18, at Kavkasioni Street in Lagodekhi, campaign materials of the UNM candidate Grigol Vashadze were damaged. In an interview with ISFED observer, the executive secretary of the UNM regional organization in Lagodekhi, Piruz Gelashvili stated that the incident happened in the evening in a populated area. According to Gelashvili, since they do not know who damaged the posters they will not be reporting the incident to the DEC.

Kazbegi

In the village of Arshashi in Kazbegi Municipality, posters of the *European Georgia* presidential candidate Davit Bakradze and the UNM presidential candidate Grigol Vashadze have been damaged. There are no witnesses and the electoral subjects have not applied to the DEC for further actions.

Zugdidi

In Tsaishi village, posters of the *European Georgia* presidential candidate Davit Bakradze were torn off. Representatives of the party explained that they do not know who did this.

Sighnaghi

Posters of the presidential candidate of the *European Georgia*, Davit Bakradze have been torn off from trees in Sighnaghi. There are no witnesses. According to the *European Georgia* representative, Malkhaz Peikrishvili posters of Davit Bakradze have been covered up with Grigol Vashadze's campaign materials, which creates suspicions that this was perpetrated by Vashadze's supporters.

Telavi

On September 27, UNM representative Giorgi Botkoveli announced on TV that campaign materials of their candidate Grigol Vashadze had been damaged on several occasions. In an interview with ISFED, UNM representative Levan Arjevanidze stated that the campaign materials were possibly damaged by a person with disability, who had been instructed to do so.

Khulo

Posters of the *European Georgia* presidential candidate Davit Bakradze have been damaged in Daba Khulo. In an interview with ISFED observer, local leader of the party Nugzar Solomonidze said that he knows about the incident but he does not know who did it and why. The materials have been damaged near offices of the DEC and Khulo Newspaper.

Kutaisi

Leader of the UNM office in Kutaisi, Giga Shushania announced on September 28 that they put up campaign posters of Grigol Vashadze on September 27 only to find the following day that all of them had been torn off from the display stand. They visited the place; also present at the scene was representative of Kutaisi Mayor in the administrative unit of Mukhrani, Nana Megrelishvili, who was taking photos of the UNM activists, laughing at them and saying – “*what did you think would happen?*” The display stand is located near the building of Mukhrani municipal body. Giga Shushania is convinced that the posters have been torn off under the instructions of Nana Megrelishvili. Megrelishvili herself has denied allegations about tearing off the posters and laughing at the UNM activists. In an interview with ISFED, she accused UNM activists of slander and said that she suspects the posters were damaged by the party activists themselves.

XV. Bookmaking regarding elections

On September 27, announcement was released on the official Facebook page of *Girchi*²⁴, urging supporters to participate in betting about elections, in order to check credibility of the poll results published by Rustavi 2. These are the terms of betting: if Zura Japaridze gets less than 5% of votes in the election, those who bet money against him will win 100% on top of their bet; if the candidate gets at least 5% of votes, the money will be kept by Girchi. According to the announcement, minimum bet is GEL 1,000.

Girchi violated art.46 of the organic law of Georgia – the Election Code of Georgia, which prohibits bookmaking regarding any issue related to elections.

²⁴ See the initiative of Girchi at:

<https://www.facebook.com/GirchiParty/photos/a.1052184021499723/2203201396397974/?type=3&theater>

XVI. Monitoring mission and methodology

International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED) conducts the pre-election monitoring in all electoral districts of Georgia through nearly 70 long-term observers.

Main areas of monitoring of the pre-election period include:

- Election administration activities;
- Public meetings of electoral subjects and their political activities;
- Cases of harassment/intimidation or alleged politically motivated dismissals from work;
- Possible instances of vote buying;
- Cases of abuse of administrative resources;
- Formation of voter lists, etc.

During the monitoring ISFED relies on public information requested from administrative agencies, as well as information provided by electoral subjects, media, NGOs and individual citizens. ISFED verifies each report by interviewing witnesses and all sides of the incident.

ISFED publishes statements and reports to keep public informed on periodic basis about violations and trends identified during the pre-election period.

The pre-election monitoring of ISFED is made possible by the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).