



ISFED

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR
FAIR ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRACY

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Holding the 2020 parliamentary elections under proportional system is commendable but abolishing the threshold poses risks

On June 24, Georgian Dream Chair Bidzina Ivanishvili publicly [announced about the initiative](#) to hold the 2020 parliamentary elections under proportional system and with no electoral threshold. Civil society in Georgia has been demanding the move to proportional system for many years now. As a result of the recent developments in the country, urgent change of the electoral system became a board public demand. Against this backdrop, the decision made by the ruling party to hold the 2020 parliamentary elections under proportional system is an important accomplishment for Georgian society.

Holding the next parliamentary elections under proportional system is essential for democratic development of Georgia, for votes to be proportionately translated into seats and for fair political representation. However the initiative to introduce the so-called zero threshold is risky.

Abolishing the electoral threshold may result in the legislature being composed of many parties with a very small support, which may have a negative impact on effectiveness of the parliament's performance. Presence of unreasonably large number of parties in Parliament may make it difficult to form the government and can potentially create threats of political crisis and instability.

Holding the elections without a reasonable threshold will increase party fragmentation and will lead to creation and potential subsequent election of parties with lack of resources and capacities to adequately engage in parliamentary performance. Georgia had a similar experience in the 1992 elections where 2% electoral threshold triggered extreme fragmentation and the trend of mass creation of political parties. Additionally, amid parties that are leader-centered and lack strong platforms, decision-making process in Parliament may become motivated by narrow individual interests and financial or other benefits.

Having a reasonable electoral threshold serves the purpose of empowering parties, constantly working with voters and safeguards legislature from antiestablishment, radical forces, unless they are supported by a significant part of the society.

Having a threshold is also recommended by the Venice Commission in its report published on March 15, 2010, which reads: *“In 2007 in its Resolution 1547 the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly opted for a 3% limit, though with the important reservation that this recommendation applied to “well-established democracies”. This threshold seems a little low, even if we recognize the important distinction between established democracies and less established ones where the party system is still being created. In the former, a 3 to 5% threshold is probably acceptable, subject to the existence of safeguards, particularly for national minorities.”*¹

Therefore, in the period of transitioning to proportional system it is important to have a 3 to 5% threshold to promote empowerment of political parties and ensure stability.

ISFED once again underlines that the move to proportional system for the 2020 parliamentary elections is crucial for democratic and peaceful development of the country. At the same ISFED urges the government to continue discussions about the threshold in relevant format and with participation of all stakeholders, in order to understand all possible risks and make decision that serves best interests of the country and the society. ISFED is ready to participate in the discussions about optimal electoral system for the 2020 parliamentary elections.

¹ Venice Commission, Report on Thresholds and Other Features of Electoral Systems which Bar Parties from Access to Parliament (II), CDL-AD(2010)007, 15 March, 2010, para.68