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# Free, Fair and Equal Electoral-Political 2022-2025 Cycle in Georgia

**NEWSLETTER №50**  
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# INTRODUCTION

Since August 2019, the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) has been implementing the project "Free, Fair and Equal Election" throughout Georgia, covering the electoral political cycle in 2022-2025 years. 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 policy processes and develop recommendations that will be communicated to the public and presented to decision-makers. Currently, we are presenting Newsletter #50, which describes the events of November that have had an impact on the political environment.

## 1. RELATIONS BETWEEN GEORGIA AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

### 1.1. Appeal from non-governmental organizations to the European Commission

On November 2, more than 150 Georgian non-governmental organizations addressed the European Commission with a letter.<sup>1</sup> According to the letter, the organizations called on the European Commission to issue a positive recommendation for granting the country candidate status, along with an objective assessment of the fulfilment of 12 priorities.<sup>2</sup> The letter also noted that the candidate status would help Georgian people to deal with Russian interests in Georgia, as "more EU means [meant] less Russia".<sup>3</sup>

### 1.2. The visit of the special representatives of the European Union and member states for Eastern Partnership in Georgia

On November 6, a delegation of special representatives of the European Union and its member states for Eastern Partnership visited Georgia.<sup>4</sup> The members of the delegation held meetings with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Ilia Darchiashvili, as well as the President of Georgia, Salome Zourabichvili, the Prime Minister, Irakli Gharibashvili, and the Speaker of the Parliament, Shalva Papuashvili.<sup>5</sup>

According to information released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, the ambassadors have expressed their appreciation for the progress made by Georgia on the path of European integration, affirming the country's European perspective.<sup>6</sup> During the meeting, emphasis was placed on the critical importance of sustaining the process of European transformation and modernization within the country. This is seen as essential for the successful realization of Georgia's ambitious agenda regarding its closeness with the European Union.<sup>7</sup>

At the meeting held at the government administration with the Prime Minister of Georgia, discussions revolved around the steps taken by the country on the path to European integration.<sup>8</sup> Irakli Gharibashvili expressed gratitude to the guests for their support of the country's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and Euro-Atlantic aspirations.<sup>9</sup>

At the Orbeliani Palace, President Salome Zourabichvili held a meeting with the special representatives of the European Union and member states in the Eastern partnership.<sup>10</sup> During the meeting, she underscored the signifi-

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<sup>1</sup> "Appeal of Georgian NGOs to the European Commission", the official website of the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, November 2, 2023, available at: <https://shorturl.at/csMXZ>, updated: 14.12.23.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> "Special representatives of the European Union and its member states in Eastern Partnership visit Georgia", information portal "Civil.ge", November 7, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/568012>, updated: 14.12.23.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

cance of obtaining candidate status and emphasized the country's commitment to European integration,<sup>11</sup> particularly in light of Russia's actions.<sup>12</sup>

### 1.3. The European Commission has recommended the granting of candidate status to Georgia

On November 8, the European Commission's report on the EU enlargement policy was published.<sup>13</sup> According to the document, three of the 12 recommendations presented to Georgia in June 2022 were considered fulfilled.<sup>14</sup> In order to achieve further progress, in addition to the initially unfulfilled recommendations, Georgia was ordered to fulfil two new conditions.<sup>15</sup> According to two additional recommendations, the country should combat disinformation and foreign information manipulation, as well as interference against the EU and its values, and improve Georgia's compliance with the EU's common foreign and security policy.<sup>16</sup>

In relation to the elections, the document underscores the crucial importance of ensuring a free, fair, and competitive election process by 2024. It also emphasizes the necessity to thoroughly consider the recommendations put forth by the Venice Commission and the OSCE Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).<sup>17</sup>

On the basis of the mentioned assessment, the European Commission has given a recommendation regarding the granting of candidate status to Georgia.<sup>18</sup>

At a press conference held together with European Commissioner for Enlargement Oliver Varhelyi, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced that the Commission recommends to the European Council the granting of candidate country status to Georgia, contingent upon the implementation of specific reform measures.<sup>19</sup>

According to the President of the European Commission, the European Commissioners fully support the sincere aspiration of the absolute majority of Georgian citizens to join the European Union, and the government should better reflect this aspiration in the implementation of the 12 priorities and cooperate with the opposition and civil society in matters of national interest.<sup>20</sup> Politicians responded to the recommendation on granting the status.

Prime Minister of the country Irakli Gharibashvili expressed gratitude for the support and noted that the country continues to move towards full membership of the European Union.<sup>21</sup>

Irakli Kobakhidze, the chairman of the ruling party, noted that the country faced numerous challenges, including process sabotage and attempts to incite a revolution while awaiting candidate status. Kobakhidze expressed gratitude to the European Commission for what he termed a 'fair decision' and expressed hope for a positive outcome in December.<sup>22</sup>

Levan Khabeishvili, Chairman of the "United National Movement", remarked that "the Georgian people have

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<sup>11</sup> "Special representatives of the European Union and its member states in Eastern Partnership visit Georgia", information portal "Civil.ge", November 7, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/568012>, updated: 14.12.23.

<sup>12</sup> On November 6, 2023, near the village of Kirbali, Gori municipality, in the occupied territory, during the attempt to illegally arrest a local resident, a Georgian citizen died as a result of shooting with a firearm by the Russian occupying forces, and one citizen was illegally detained.

<sup>13</sup> "Georgia's progress towards EU candidate status: European Commission assessment", information portal Civil.ge, November 13, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/569156>, updated: 14.12.23.

<sup>14</sup> 1. Consolidation of efforts to promote gender equality and combat violence against women; 2. Adoption of legislation requiring Georgian courts to actively take into account the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights; 3. A transparent and independent nomination process for the appointment of a new Public Defender (Ombudsman).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> "Georgia's progress towards EU candidate status: European Commission's assessment", information portal "Civil.ge", November 12, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/569156>, updated: 14.12.23.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> "The European Commission recommended granting candidate status to Georgia", information portal "Civil.ge", November 8, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/568370>, updated: 14.12.23.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> "Georgian politicians echo the recommendation of granting candidate status to Georgia", information portal "Civil.ge", November 8, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/568532>, updated: 14.12.23.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

won the first round against the Russian dream and the Russian oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili”. Khabeishvili expressed hope that the provided recommendation marks the first successful step, with subsequent victories anticipated over the “Russian Party”.<sup>23</sup>

Giorgi Gakharia, the leader of the “For Georgia” party, expressed gratitude to the Georgian people for their support and commitment to the European aspiration. According to him, the realization of peace, prosperity, and security is only possible in collaboration with Europe.<sup>24</sup>

The European Council will take the final decision on granting Georgia the status of EU membership candidate at the December 14-15 session.<sup>25</sup>

## 2. “GIRCHI - MORE FREEDOM” AND “DROA” NEW PROJECT – “BALLOT BOX IN YOUR CITY”

On November 28, political parties in the pre-election union<sup>26</sup> “Girchi - more freedom” and “Droa” came out with a new initiative.<sup>27</sup> The parties have initiated a campaign titled “Ballot Box in Your City”, with the aim of streamlining the voting process for citizens residing abroad during the 2024 parliamentary elections and fostering increased participation in the electoral process.<sup>28</sup>

According to Zurab Girchi Japaridze, the activity of immigrants in the parliamentary elections of 2024 may be of critical importance in terms of determining the results.<sup>29</sup> Japaridze urged Georgian citizens living abroad to complete a special form, emphasizing that this would assist the project team in facilitating communication with them.<sup>30</sup>

A day earlier, on November 27, the President of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili spoke about the importance of participation in the elections of Georgian citizens living abroad.<sup>31</sup> During the meeting with representatives from the academic circle, Zourabichvili emphasized that it is untenable to consistently seek support from compatriots abroad without granting them the basic right—the right to participate in elections.<sup>32</sup>

## 3. NIKA MELIA IS NO LONGER A MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT

On November 26, the chairman of the ‘United National Movement’ party, Levan Khabeishvili, announced live on Formula TV that the former party chairman, Nika Melia, is no longer part of the party.<sup>33</sup> Khabeishvili’s televised speech was followed by the party’s official statement. In the statement, it was once again mentioned that Nika Melia did not join the Manifesto<sup>34</sup> of the unity of the party published on the initiative and authorship of Mikheil Saakashvili, and he does not represent the “National Movement”.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> “The European Commission recommended granting candidate status to Georgia”, information portal “Civil.ge”, November 8, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/568370>, updated: 14.12.23.

<sup>26</sup> ““Girchi - more freedom” and “Droa” form an electoral union”, information portal “Civil.ge”, September 6, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/558021>, updated: 14.12.23.

<sup>27</sup> ““Girchi - more freedom” and “Droa” offer immigrants a new project for the elections”, informatoin portal “Netgazeti”, November 28, 2023, available at: <https://shorturl.at/kovy6>, updated: 14.12.23.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> “President to scientists - Europe is our future!”, official website of the President of Georgia, November 27, 2023, available at: <https://shorturl.at/AOX38>, updated: 14.12.23.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> “Khabeishvili: Nika Melia does not represent the National Movement, is no longer a member of the party”, information portal “Formulanews”, November 27, 2023, available at: <https://formulanews.ge/News/102099>, updated: 14.12.23.

<sup>34</sup> “National Movement publishes 11-point manifesto”, information portal Formulanews, November 22, 2023, available at: <https://formulanews.ge/News/101893>, updated:

<sup>35</sup> “Khabeishvili: Nika Melia does not represent the National Movement, is no longer a member of the party”, information portal “Formulanews”, November 27, 2023, available at: [14.12.23.https://formulanews.ge/News/102099](https://formulanews.ge/News/102099), updated: 14.12.23.

Intra-party disagreements within the ‘National Movement’ became public as early as September 2022 when Nika Melia, during an appearance on the First TV Company, discussed the dangers of informal governance within the party.<sup>36</sup>

Following internal party elections held on January 28-29, 2023, Levan Khabeishvili assumed the role of the new chairman of the ‘National Movement’, securing 52.58% of the voters’ support.<sup>37</sup>

## **4. THE PARLIAMENT OF GEORGIA, IN ITS FIRST READING, APPROVED THE DRAFT LAW ON VOTING USING THE SO-CALLED LAMINATED ID CARD**

On November 15, the Parliament of Georgia, with 77 votes in favour during the first reading, endorsed the legislative initiative proposed by MP Fridon Injia. The initiative aims to grant citizens with non-electronic ID cards the opportunity to participate in elections.<sup>38</sup>

The issue of documents necessary for the identification of voters at the polling station was regulated in a new way as a result of the changes made in the election legislation in December 2022, and it was determined that in the general parliamentary elections of 2024, the voter would be able to vote only if he/she presented an electronic identity card of a citizen of Georgia or a passport of a citizen of Georgia.<sup>39</sup>

According to the Public Defender of Georgia Levan Ioseliani, the right to vote is a constitutional right and it cannot be restricted. In his opinion, every citizen should be given the opportunity to participate in the elections with the document he has.<sup>40</sup>

According to Giorgi Sioridze, the opposition deputy chairman of the CEC, voting in the elections is not an absolute right, and whoever wants to participate in the elections should also take an electronic identity card. Sioridze cited the example of the right to leave the country, for which a citizen is obligated to have a biometric passport.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> “According to Nika Melia, partnership with Davit Kezerashvili is dangerous for the party”, information portal “Radio Tavisupleba”, September 25, 2022, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/32051157.html>, updated: 14.12.23.

<sup>37</sup> “Levan Khabeishvili became the new chairman of the United National Movement”, information portal “Civil.ge”, January 30, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/522935>, updated: 14.12.23.

<sup>38</sup> “Parliament adopted Fridon Injia’s legislative initiative, which will allow citizens with non-electronic ID cards to participate in elections, in the first reading”, information portal “Interpressnews”, November 15, 2023, available at: <https://shorturl.at/jsAQ0>, updated: 27.12.2023.

<sup>39</sup> Paragraph 19 of Article 63 of the Election Code of Georgia, subparagraphs “a” and “b” of Article 65, paragraph 2, subparagraph “g” of the first paragraph of Article 76<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> “Voting with old IDs - at what stage is the discussion of Fridon Injia’s initiative”, information portal “Publika”, November 16, 2023, available at: <https://shorturl.at/lptIP>, updated: 27.12.2023.

<sup>41</sup> “They see the danger of election fraud in the changes initiated regarding voting with old ID cards”, information portal “Civil.ge”, November 15, 2023, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/571589>, updated: 27.12.2023.