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**GEORGIAN
YOUNG
LAWYERS'
ASSOCIATION**

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

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INTRODUCTION

The Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA) started implementing the project – “Free, Fair and Equal Election Political Cycle 2019-2022” throughout the country in August 2019. One of the project’s goals is to promote the improvement of the election environment through monitoring and evidence-based advocacy. To achieve this, the organization will monitor ongoing policy processes and develop recommendations that will be communicated to the public and presented to decision-makers. We present the Newsletter №28, describing the events that took place in January 2022, which impacted the political environment.

I. DISTRIBUTION OF POSTS IN MUNICIPAL ASSEMBLIES

The municipal assemblies elected in the 2021 local self-government elections began their work on October 3. Still, the redistribution process was delayed in the municipalities where the Georgian Dream failed to win a majority.¹ In January, they managed to overcome the crisis in Tsalenjikha. At the sixth session, Cornel Salia, a member of the party For Georgia, was elected as a chairperson of the City Assembly.² It should be noted that the Georgian Dream did not participate in the voting as a sign of protest.³ On January 31, Nodar Sherozia, a member of the party For Georgia, was elected as a chairperson of the City Assembly in Rustavi.⁴ Representatives of the opposition parties, the United National Movement and the party For Georgia, were supported as deputy chairpersons in both municipalities.⁵

The distribution of positions was delayed in Batumi City Assembly as well, where neither party managed to get enough 18 votes to elect the chairperson. The session could not be held on December 23 - the members elected by the Georgian Dream did not attend the session. Therefore, the quorum required to start the session could not be collected. The situation was also complicated by the death of Nugzar Putkaradze, the 35th member of the City Assembly, a representative of the United National Movement.⁶

Due to the lack of a quorum, the fifth session of the Zugdidi City Assembly in January, like the previous four, was also postponed and will be held in February.⁷ Consequently, they could not elect a chairperson here either.⁸

¹ “Six Hung City Assemblies Fail to Elect Chairs“, information portal Civil.ge, December 12, 2021, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/460040>, updated: 24.02.2022.

² „Gakharia’s party member elected as Tsalenjikha Municipal Assembly head“, information portal Radio Tavisupleba, January 20, 2022, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31663039.html>, updated: 24.02.2022.

³ “Opposition Elects Chair in Hung Tsalenjikha City Assembly“, information portal Civil.ge, January 20, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/467716>, updated: 24.02.2022.

⁴ “Opposition Elects Chair in Hung Rustavi City Assembly“, information portal Civil.ge, January 31, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/469921>, updated: 24.02.2022.

⁵ “Tsalenjikha City Assembly elected opposition representatives as the chairperson deputies“, Information portal Radio Tavisupleba, January 25, 2022, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31670329.html>, updated: 24.02.2022;

Opposition Elects Chair in Hung Rustavi City Assembly, information portal Civil.ge, January 31, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/469921>, updated: 24.02.2022.

⁶ “The National Movement demands a timely investigation into the cause of death of a member of the Batumi City Assembly“, information portal Radio Tavisupleba, January 25, 2022, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31670146.html>, updated: 24.02.2022.

⁷ “A Chairman of Zugdidi City Assembly could not be elected for the fifth time“, information portal Radio Tavisupleba, January 12, 2022, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31650652.html>, updated: 24.02.2022.

⁸ Ibid.

II. ELECTION OF THE CEC CHAIRPERSON

On January 24, President Salome Zurbishvili nominated two candidates for the post of CEC chairperson and four candidates for membership.⁹ Zurbishvili named Giorgi Kalandarishvili, incumbent chairperson, and Tengiz Tevzadze for the vacancy.¹⁰ Kalandarishvili was elected as the CEC chairperson in August 2021 for a term of 6 months.¹¹ Part of the opposition parties, Lelo and Strategy Aghmashenebeli, said they would support Tevzadze's candidacy because they thought the independence of Kalandarishvili was questionable.¹²

III. THE CASE OF MIKHEIL SAAKASHVILI

On January 18, Mikheil Saakashvili's lawyers appealed to the Prosecutor's Office to declare him a victim of crime.¹³ They demanded to recognize the ex-president as a victim of degrading and inhuman treatment.¹⁴ On January 19, the ombudsman described the appeal as a "fair demand"¹⁵ but also said that more information was needed to recommend that Saakashvili be recognized as a victim and that work was underway at that stage.¹⁶ The Prosecutor denied the request of the third president's lawyers on January 20.¹⁷

On January 19, the fifth report of a group of doctors set up by the Public Defender to monitor the health of Mikheil Saakashvili, who was detained, was published.¹⁸ According to the report, "the patient's condition still needed attention". For the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression, the President had to undergo therapy, the recommendation of which was issued on November 25, 2021.¹⁹ Nevertheless, no similar treatment has been performed to date; hence the patient's condition has not improved in this regard.²⁰ According to the recommendation of the group of doctors, Mikheil Saakashvili needed psychotherapy, physical rehabilitation, and additional examinations for his full rehabilitation.²¹

On January 11, the Tbilisi City Court overturned the decision of the State Inspector's Office for illegally disclosing Mikheil Saakashvili's personal data by the Ministry of Justice.²² On January 17, a similar decision was made against the Special Penitentiary Service.²³ The Office of the State Inspector responded to the conclusion and

⁹ Kristine Kajaia, Levan Isakadze, Maia Zaridze and Gia Tsatsashvili are nominated for the membership.

See "CEC Chair, Membership Candidates Selected", information portal Civil.ge, January 25, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/468584>, updated: 24.02.2022.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ "New CEC Chair Elected", Information portal Civil.ge, August 2, 2021, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/435153>, updated: 24.02.2022.

¹² "CEC Chair, Membership Candidates Selected", information portal Civil.ge, January 25, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/468584>, updated: 24.02.2022.

¹³ "Lawyers applied to the Prosecutor's Office with a request to recognize Saakashvili as a victim", information portal Radio Tavisupleba, January 18, 2022, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31659730.html>, updated: 24.02.2022.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ "The demand to grant Saakashvili the status of a victim is well-argued", information portal Radio Tavisupleba, January 19, 2022, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31661273.html>, updated: 24.02.2022.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ "The Prosecutor's Office did not recognize Saakashvili as a victim in the case of inhuman treatment", information portal Radio Tavisupleba, January 20, 2022, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31663175.html>, updated: 24.02.2022.

¹⁸ "Saakashvili's Condition Not Improving, Doctors Say", information portal Civil.ge, January 20, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/467683>, updated: 24.02.2022.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² "Saakashvili Footages: Court Overturns State Inspector's Decision against Justice Ministry", information portal Civil.ge, January 12, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/466406>, updated 24.02.2022.

²³ "Saakashvili Footage: Court Overturns State Inspector's Decision against Penitentiary", information portal Civil.ge, January 17, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/467286>, updated: 24.02.2022.

described the complete annulment of the Inspector’s decisions by the Court as a “dangerous precedent” for the standard of protection of the rights of persons in a penitentiary institution.²⁴ The statement also said that the Court decision reduced the general state of personal data protection in the country.²⁵

IV. TERMINATION OF THE PARLIAMENTARY BOYCOTT BY THE UNITED NATIONAL MOVEMENT

On January 31, the United National Movement (UNM) decided to end its parliamentary boycott.²⁶ Khatia Dekanoidze, the chairperson of the opposition faction National Movement - Power is in Unity, informed the public about this decision.²⁷ She said the main goal of the party’s parliamentary activities was to set up a temporary Inquiry Commission for the third president’s case and “expose the regime”, in particular how the ruling party treated Saakashvili using “repressive institutions”.²⁸ Khatia Dekanoidze first voiced the idea of setting up a Parliamentary Inquiry Commission, and soon Mikheil Saakashvili came up with the initiative.²⁹ According to the United National Movement, the Parliamentary Inquiry Commission should have investigated the “facts of inhuman and degrading treatment” to Mikheil Saakashvili at the Gldani Penitentiary Institution.³⁰

V. TERMINATION OF MANDATES FOR MPS

On January 12, the Tbilisi City Court reclassified the charges of the money laundering to the fraud, Article 180, for the founders of the Lelo party, Badri Japaridze and Mamuka Khazaradze, as well as the father of Vato Tsereteli, the founder of the TV Pirveli, Avtandil Tsereteli, and sentenced to 7 years in prison each.³¹ However, the court acquitted the convicts due to the statute of limitations.³²

For information, the case was launched in 2018, and in 2019 the Prosecutor General’s Office charged the founders of TBC Bank, Mamuka Khazaradze and Badri Japaridze, as well as Avtandil Tsereteli, with money laundering under Article 194 of the Criminal Code.³³ The accusation concerned the lending of \$17 million by TBC Bank to companies owned by Avtandil Tsereteli in 2008.³⁴ According to the Prosecutor’s Office, the companies transferred the money as a loan to Badri Japaridze and Mamuka Khazaradze on the same day.³⁵ According to the Prosecutor’s Office, in 2012, these companies were fully released from the existing obligations from the bank.³⁶

Japaridze and Khazaradze disagreed with the court decision and promised to appeal against it in the Court of Ap-

²⁴ The official Facebook page of the State Inspector’s Service, January 17, 2022, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=235307858772557&set=a.231272702509406>, updated: 24.02.2022.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ “UNM Calls off Parliamentary Boycott”, information portal Civil.ge, January 31, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/469872>, updated: 24.02.2022.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ “We are going to set up an Inquiry Commission into the case of Mikheil Saakashvili”, January 31, 2021, official Facebook page of Mtavari Arkhi, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/TvMtavari/videos/5351426014902099/>, updated: 24.02.2022.

²⁹ “Parliamentary Inquiry: Why Saakashvili Demands Commission for His Case”, information portal Radio Tavisupleba, January 4, 2022, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31639233.html>, updated: 24.02.2022.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ “Khazaradze, Japaridze Jailed, but not Jailed”, information portal Civil.ge, January 12, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/466249>, updated: 24.02.2022.

³² Ibid.

³³ “Key Points: TBC Bank Affair”, information portal Civil.ge, March 11, 2019, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/278912>, updated: 24.02.2022.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

peals.³⁷ Mamuka Khazaradze assessed the court verdict as a political decision made on the instructions of Bidzina Ivanishvili.³⁸ According to Badri Japaridze, no criminal action was taken by them.³⁹ For its part, the prosecution also decided to appeal the decision, which did not agree with the reclassification of the charge by the court.⁴⁰

Other representatives of opposition parties also responded to the current developments. According to Nika Melia, the chairperson of the United National Movement, Bidzina Ivanishvili had planned to use political justice to weaken the opposition parties. Still, as a result, their “intransigence was strengthened”.⁴¹ Salome Samadashvili, a member of the faction Lelo-Partnership for Georgia, assessed the case of Khazaradze-Japaridze as a “political order” and stressed the importance of establishing the rule of law for the development of the country.⁴² Giorgi Vashadze, the leader of Strategy Aghmashenebeli, called the case “politically motivated”, while Independent MP Davit Bakradze called it “legally nonsense”.⁴³ Mikheil Sarjveladze, a Georgian Dream MP, also commented on the Court decision.⁴⁴ In his opinion, despite the legal qualification and the category of the crime, the Court had no problem with confirming the “criminal fact”.⁴⁵ According to Sarjveladze, according to the constitution, there was a formal basis for the Parliament to consider the issue of termination of the mandate for Badri Japaridze.⁴⁶ Badri Japaridze said that if the Parliament considered terminating his mandate, it would be a “new wave of political persecution”.⁴⁷

Shalva Natelashvili and Elene Khoshtaria are also threatened with the cancellation of their mandates.⁴⁸ In their case, the issue of termination of authority may be raised on the grounds of failing to attend sittings without good reason.⁴⁹

VI. RESULTS OF THE NATIONAL DEMOCRACY INSTITUTE PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY

On January 27, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) released the results of a public opinion poll.⁵⁰ According to the research, the main challenge for the population of Georgia was economic poverty.⁵¹ Citizens believed that the country was developing in the wrong direction and that no progress had been made on important issues for the country in the last ten years.⁵² Despite their political views, citizens had common assessments on the country’s major challenges and key economic problems.⁵³

³⁷ “Khazaradze and Japaridze will appeal today’s decision of the court”, information portal Radio Tavisupleba, January 12, 2022, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31650386.html>, updated: 24.02.2022.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ “The Prosecutor’s Office will appeal the verdict in the Khazaradze-Japaridze-Tsereteli case”, Information portal Radio Tavisupleba, January 12, 2022, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31650628.html>, updated: 24.02.2022.

⁴¹ “In Quotes: Political Reactions to Khazaradze, Japaridze Ruling”, information portal Civil.ge, January 12, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/466439>, updated: 24.02.2022.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ “GD Mulls Stripping Lelo’s Badri Japaridze of MP Mandate”, information portal Civil.ge, January 13, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/466808>, updated: 24.02.2022.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ “Parliamentary Addition-Subtraction”, information portal Radio Tavisupleba, January 31, 2022, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31679896.html>, updated: 24.02.2022.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ “NDI Poll: Economy Top Concern, Lack of Confidence in Political Parties”, information portal Civil.ge, January 27, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/469218>, updated: 24.02.2022.

⁵¹ “NDI poll: Deterioration of the Economy at the Forefront of People’s Minds; Majority Says Nobody Acts in their Best Interest”, the official website of the NDI Georgia, January 27, 2022, available at: <https://bit.ly/3tn9Xes>, updated: 24.02.2022.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ “Public Opinion in Georgia: Key Findings from December 2021”, a Telephone Survey, the official website of the NDI Georgia, available at: <https://bit.ly/3HHn8Ms>, updated: 24.02.2022.

The survey showed that public confidence in political parties and public institutions were critically low.⁵⁴ For 92% of respondents, living in a democratic state was “very important” or “important”.⁵⁵ However, every other citizen believed that Georgia was not a democracy.⁵⁶ The majority believed that the actions of the ruling party and the opposition parties were not focused on the needs of the population.⁵⁷ 53% of citizens thought that the legislature did not work on issues that were important to them.⁵⁸ 52% also did not believe that if they asked a Member of Parliament about the problems in their town, they would help solve them.⁵⁹

Only 42% of the population named a particular party that stood closest to their views.⁶⁰ The rest did not know or refused to name such a party.⁶¹

A considerable proportion of respondents were dissatisfied with the activities of government, institutions, and political leaders.⁶² The assessment of the activities of the Prime Minister and the President also deteriorated.⁶³ The activities of the Central Election Commission were also assessed negatively, and this figure has tripled in the last six years.⁶⁴

It should be noted that according to the results of the research, against the background of political polarization, the population was in favor of inter-party cooperation.⁶⁵ Despite their political stance, citizens shared the view on the importance of collaboration between the parties.⁶⁶ 80% thought that the party they elected should cooperate with all other parties in Parliament, including those whose actions or opinions were unacceptable to them.⁶⁷ The majority also believed that the role of mediator between the ruling party and the opposition should be played by local players (50% - political parties, the President, the Speaker of the Parliament, 18% - Western partners).⁶⁸

The survey showed that the population had a uniform view of Georgia’s foreign policy course.⁶⁹ For 83%, the stated goal of the Georgian government on Georgia’s accession to the European Union was acceptable.⁷⁰ Despite their political views, citizens agreed that EU membership was important for the country.⁷¹ Similarly, 77% of respondents supported Georgia’s accession to NATO.⁷²

⁵⁴ “NDI poll: Deterioration of the Economy at the Forefront of People’s Minds; Majority Says Nobody Acts in their Best Interest”, the official website of the NDI Georgia.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ “Public Opinion in Georgia: Key Findings from December 2021”, a Telephone Survey, the official website of the NDI Georgia.

⁵⁸ “NDI poll: Deterioration of the Economy at the Forefront of People’s Minds; Majority Says Nobody Acts in their Best Interest”, the official website of the NDI Georgia”.

⁵⁹ “Public Opinion in Georgia: Key Findings from December 2021”, a Telephone Survey, the official website of the NDI Georgia.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ “NDI poll: Deterioration of the Economy at the Forefront of People’s Minds; Majority Says Nobody Acts in their Best Interest”, the official website of the NDI Georgia.

⁶⁶ “Public Opinion in Georgia: Key Findings from December 2021”, a Telephone Survey, the official website of the NDI Georgia.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ “NDI poll: Deterioration of the Economy at the Forefront of People’s Minds; Majority Says Nobody Acts in their Best Interest”, the official website of the NDI Georgia.

⁷⁰ “Georgians Overwhelmingly Support Joining EU, NATO, New Survey Shows”, information portal Civil.ge, January 27, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/469136>, updated: 24.02.2022.

⁷¹ “NDI poll: Deterioration of the Economy at the Forefront of People’s Minds; Majority Says Nobody Acts in their Best Interest”, the official website of the NDI Georgia.

⁷² Ibid.

VII. CANCELED VISIT OF MEPS TO GEORGIA

On January 21, the facilitators of the Jean Monnet Dialogue, MEPs Viola von Cramon, Miriam Lexmann, and Marina Kaljurand, announced that their visit to Georgia scheduled for January 21-22, had been canceled because the Speaker of the Georgian Parliament, Shalva Papuashvili, did not find time for a meeting.⁷³ The purpose of the visit was to explore the possibilities of starting the Jean Monnet Dialogue process with Parliament.⁷⁴ The aim of the Dialogue was to develop an inter-party dialogue aimed at “building a democratic parliamentary culture and trust”.⁷⁵ Its implementation was also one of the key points of the April 19 agreement.⁷⁶ The MEPs expressed regrets that the political conditions necessary for the start of the process were not fulfilled at the current stage.⁷⁷ Viola von Cramon responded to this on Twitter and noted that the EU has all the tools to facilitate dialogue between political parties in Georgia.⁷⁸ However, the start of the Jean Monnet Dialogue was delayed due to the Georgian Parliament.⁷⁹ Regarding the cancellation of the visit, MEP Miriam Lexmann said they remained committed to the Jean Monnet Dialogue and expected the same from the Georgian Parliament.⁸⁰

On January 22, the Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia also responded to the statement of the MEPs.⁸¹ According to the statement of the Speaker’s Office, before the start of the Jean Monnet Dialogue, a meeting should have taken place between the Speaker of the Parliament of Georgia Shalva Papuashvili and the newly elected President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola.⁸²

On January 24, Georgian Dream MP Irakli Zarkua criticized members of the EU legislature for “Groundless, Unfair Antics”.⁸³ He claimed that a protocol should have been elaborated before the meeting, but the European deputies were “rushing” to Georgia before that.⁸⁴ He advised members of the European Parliament to keep themselves busy with some other tasks.⁸⁵

⁷³ “MEPs Cancel Tbilisi Visit as Georgian Speaker Didn’t Find Time to Engage”, information portal Civil.ge, January 22, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/468053>, updated: 24.02.2022.

⁷⁴ “The Inter-Party Dialogue with the National Assembly of Serbia concludes its second phase ahead of the upcoming local, parliamentary and presidential elections”, the official website of the European Parliament, January 28, 2022, available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/globaldemocracysupport/en/mediation-and-dialogue/latest-news>, updated: 24.02.2022.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ “Future Path for Georgia”, the official website of the European Union External Action Service, accessible: https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/mediacia_samomavlo_gza_sakartvelostvis.pdf, updated: 22.02.2022.

⁷⁷ “The Inter-Party Dialogue with the National Assembly of Serbia concludes its second phase ahead of the upcoming local”, parliamentary and presidential elections, the official website of the European Parliament.

⁷⁸ Viola Von Cramon, Twitterpost, January 21, 2022, available at: <https://twitter.com/ViolavonCramon/status/1484564311984988173?s=20>, updated: 24.02.2022.

⁷⁹ Ibid

⁸⁰ Miriam M. Lexmann, Twitterpost, January 21, 2022, available at: <https://twitter.com/MiriamMLex/status/1484565979250270215?s=20>, updated: 24.02.2022.

⁸¹ “Georgian Speaker Wants to Meet New EP President before Jean Monnet Talks”, information portal Civil.ge, January 22, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/468060>, updated: 24.02.2022.

⁸² “Statement of the Cabinet of the Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia”, the official website of the Parliament of Georgia, January 22, 2022, available at: <https://parliament.ge/media/news/sakartvelos-parlamentis-tavmjdomaris-kabinetis-gantskhadeba>, updated: 24.02.2022.

⁸³ “GD MP Hits Out at MEPs over “Groundless, Unfair Antics”, information portal Civil.ge, January 24, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/468405>, updated: 24.02.2022.

⁸⁴ “We cannot tolerate such whims - the MEPs should do something else, if they have to” – Zarkua, the YouTube Channel of TV Kavkasia, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=97HICRsXfp4>, updated: 24.02.2022.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

VIII. GEORGIA IN THE REPORT OF THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

The Monitoring Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) monitored the implementation of the commitments made by the member states in 2021 in 11 countries.⁸⁶ On January 28, 2022, the Parliamentary Assembly adopted a resolution on the progress of the monitoring and reviewed the report on the progress of the Assembly’s monitoring procedure.⁸⁷ According to the resolution, the Parliamentary Assembly expressed concern over the political polarization in the country, which led to the non-fulfillment of the April 19 agreement.⁸⁸ The Assembly called on the political parties to engage in constructive dialogue with each other and to fulfill their obligations under the Association Agreement with the European Union.⁸⁹ A separate chapter in the report was dedicated to assessing the political situation in Georgia in 2021.⁹⁰ According to the report, “a tense and polarized political climate in Georgia has been hampering the country’s democratic consolidation”.⁹¹ The report assessed the 2021 municipal elections as “competent and fair” but pointed to pressure on voters, allegations of voter bribery, and unequal conditions between the parties in favor of the ruling party.⁹² The report also addresses problems in the field of justice.

IX. REMARKS BY THE US AMBASSADOR KELLY DEGNAN ON THE EMBASSY’S 30TH ANNIVERSARY

On January 26, the US Embassy marked the 30th Anniversary of diplomatic relations between the United States and Georgia.⁹³ In her speech on the occasion of the celebration, Kelly Degnan also touched upon the state of democratic institutions in Georgia.⁹⁴ According to the Ambassador, the vision for the next 30 years of cooperation was optimistic, but the political and democratic institutions in Georgia were not yet sufficiently developed and could not meet the “democratic ideals”. According to the ambassador, an additional obstacle to democratic development is the “highly biased and polarized political environment”.⁹⁵ The Ambassador noted that the political situation in Georgia over the past 30 years and the threats posed by Russia demanded the protection of democratic institutions from “autocratic tendencies”.⁹⁶ In the current situation, according to the Ambassador, the unity of the Georgian population and effective use of the various development opportunities facing the country were necessary.⁹⁷

⁸⁶ “Georgia in PACE Monitoring Committee 2021 Report”, information portal Civil.ge, January 24, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/468392>, updated: 24.02.2022.

⁸⁷ “Progress of the Assembly’s monitoring procedure” (January-December 2021), the official website of the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe, January 28, 2022, available at: <https://pace.coe.int/en/files/29804/html>, updated: 24.02.2022.

⁸⁸ Ibid

⁸⁹ Ibid

⁹⁰ “Georgia in PACE Monitoring Committee 2021 Report”, information portal Civil.ge.

⁹¹ “Progress of the Assembly’s monitoring procedure” (January - December 2021), Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ “U.S. Ambassador Talks Georgia’s Stunted Institutions”, information portal Civil.ge, January 26, 2022, available at: <https://civil.ge/ka/archives/468817>, updated: 24.02.2022.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ “30th Anniversary Celebration Speech by Ambassador Kelly Degnan”, US Embassy Georgia, the official website, January 25, 2022, available at: <https://bit.ly/3pcM0Wh>, updated: 24.02.2022.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.