



JOINT STATEMENT BY THE CHAIR OF THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE, MEP David McALLISTER, THE CHAIR OF THE DELEGATION FOR RELATIONS WITH THE SOUTH CAUCASUS, MEP Marina KALJURAND, THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT'S STANDING RAPPORTEUR ON GEORGIA, MEP Sven MIKSER, AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT'S LEAD MEMBER FOR DEMOCRACY SUPPORT ACTIVITIES IN GEORGIA, MEP Viola VON CRAMON-TAUBADEL

on the first round of the parliamentary elections held on 31 October in Georgia

Brussels, 1 November 2020 - "We would like to congratulate Georgia, a key ally of the EU, on successfully organising the first round of the parliamentary elections despite a difficult epidemiological context.

After the signing of a historic agreement between Georgia's main political parties on 8 March, and the subsequent adoption in early summer of an election reform package that took into account some of the OSCE/ODIHR's past recommendations, it was a pivotal moment to assess the commitment of both authorities and political parties to uphold democratic processes and the rule of law.

Although Georgia is a priority country for its democracy support programme, the European Parliament could not send a delegation to observe these elections, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated travel and health restrictions. Nevertheless, the OSCE/ODIHR was able to deploy a limited election observation mission comprising a core team of experts and long-term observers. On election day, they joined efforts with short-term observers sent by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. They have been supported by the 'European Diplomatic Watch' which, at the initiative of the EU Delegation in Georgia, has deployed over 70 teams to visit around 1,000 polling stations across the country.

We take note that these elections were found to be competitive and freedoms were respected overall, despite deplorable cases of pressure on voters and blurring of the line between the ruling party and the State throughout the campaign and on election day.

Candidates were able to campaign freely, giving voters a genuine choice between a variety of platforms. The level of interest and engagement on the part of civil society actors also constitutes a positive feature of these elections.

The media and political landscapes are still highly polarised, which was consequently reflected by harsh rhetoric on all sides, albeit to a lesser extent than in the run-up to the 2018 presidential election, which is a positive development.

The issue of campaign financing needs to be further addressed in line with long-standing OSCE/ODIHR recommendations.

We appreciate that pragmatic solutions were found to allow quarantined and self-isolated citizens to cast their ballots in special polling stations, which was a fair compromise between democratic and public health requirements.

We very much deplore that citizens in the occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia were once again deprived of their right to vote.

Today, following the first round and ahead of the second round, we call for calm. All possible appeals and complaints, substantiated with necessary details and some element of proof, should be handled in a fair, transparent and rigorous manner.

The European Parliament will remain very attentive to further developments during the rest of the electoral period, including on the day of the second round.

We look forward to further cooperating with the newly elected parliament on Georgia's chosen Euro-Atlantic integration path."

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