



# NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Suite 503, 1717 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20036 (202) 328-3136

■ FAX (202) 939-3166  
■ Telex 5106015068 NDILA

## PRELIMINARY STATEMENT OF THE NDI INTERNATIONAL

### OBSERVER DELEGATION

October 13, 1992

This is the preliminary statement of a 24-member international delegation that observed Georgia's parliamentary elections on October 11, 1992. The delegation, organized by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), includes parliamentarians, political party leaders, election experts and regional specialists from 10 countries in Africa, Europe and the United States.

The NDI delegation wishes to congratulate the Georgian people for their peaceful and enthusiastic participation in the electoral process and election commission representatives at all levels for their tireless efforts to conduct an open and orderly election. While the process will not be complete until all the votes are counted and tallied and the Central Election Commission announces the final results, what the delegation has witnessed to date indicates that this election will confer democratic legitimacy upon the new government and promote substantially the conditions for peaceful reconciliation in Georgia.

This election was held under especially difficult conditions. War had broken out in the Abkhazian region of Georgia. Threats of violence and boycotts there and in other regions caused the postponement of elections in nine voting areas representing approximately 9 percent of the voting population. Accommodations had to be made for refugees from the Abkhazian war zone to vote at sites to which they had been temporarily relocated. In some areas, an active boycott of the election was undertaken by supporters of the elected and then ousted president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia. Despite these conditions, in most areas of the country, the turnout is reported to be 80 percent or better.

The NDI delegation expresses its deep concern for the victims of the fighting in Abkhazia and its fervent hope that peace will soon be restored to this region. The delegation is appalled by the stories of atrocities reported by many refugees with whom the delegation spoke. The United Nations and other authorized bodies should investigate these reports, ensuring that those responsible for crimes against humanity are brought to justice.

The delegation believes that the postponed elections should be held in Abkhazia -- and in the other regions -- as soon as conditions permit. These elections and not the force of arms should determine the future government of this autonomous region of

Georgia. The delegation hopes that all governments in the region, particularly the Russian government, will cooperate to create the appropriate conditions for these elections.

The 24-member NDI delegation was able to gain a national perspective of the October 11 elections from its teams dispersed throughout the country. Approximately, 10 percent of the precincts were visited with special attention paid to potential trouble areas. Pre-election missions conducted by NDI and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), and staff representation by both organizations in Georgia over the past three months, enabled the delegation to gain a sense of the campaign period and the process through which the election system and administration was created and adopted. NDI and IFES will keep representatives in Georgia until the election process is completed, whereupon the delegation will prepare and issue a comprehensive final report.

Several factors led the NDI delegation to accept the election process as a sound basis for resolving the legal status of Georgia's government. The election regulations were debated openly among the major political sectors of Georgian society represented on an inclusive, albeit non-elected, State Council. The regulations were adopted by the Council after extensive negotiation and compromise. The delegation concluded that the regulations complied with international standards for democratic elections, providing an adequate framework for competition among political parties and individual candidates.

The delegation notes that the regulations did not require citizens to vote as is the case in some countries. Therefore, the option to abstain from participation was available to those who objected to the electoral exercise, enabling them to give voice to their position. Apparently, few exercised this option.

Some Georgians have raised concern about the legality of a direct election for the chairman of the new parliament and the possibility that this individual could be elected with as little as one-third of those voting. Furthermore, the candidate for this office, Eduard Shevardnadze, ran unopposed, which gave rise to concerns among some Georgians about their ability to make a real choice.

The delegation notes, however, that a majority of those represented in the State Council agreed to create the position of chairman -- using the same method that had been used to adopt the election regulations. The delegation understands that the position's creation resulted from Mr. Shevardnadze's decision to stand for election as the head of one of the 'bloc' party lists and that support for the amendment came from those who feared his popularity would distort the electoral process in favor of that coalition. The amendment adopted on August 31 enabled any candidate to register for this position with 5,000 signatures.