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CALM AND ORDERLY GEORGIAN ELECTIONS SET NEW POLITICAL LANDSCAPE, NDI MISSION FINDS

TBILISI – With the ability to make informed choices and express their will at the ballot box, Georgians participated in their most competitive elections in a decade on Oct. 1 and ushered in a period that will require a consultative and participatory legislative process in a newly-pluralist parliament, an observer delegation from the National Democratic Institute (NDI) [said here today](#).

“The responsibility now lies with the country’s political leaders to engage immediately in constructive dialogue and reconciliation,” NDI said.

The elections are also significant in the context of the country’s changing political landscape. The rise of the Georgian Dream bloc backed by Bidzina Ivanishvili unified a significant segment of Georgia’s political opposition, injecting competition into the political process. Next year the country faces a presidential election when two-term incumbent President Mikheil Saakashvili is prohibited by the constitution from running again.

NDI polling shows that many Georgians are optimistic about democratic and economic advancements in their country, and have high expectations for continuing reforms and hopes for further integration with Euro-Atlantic organizations.

“Four years after the August 2008 war with Russia, Georgians are also concerned about the country’s security and territorial integrity. Advancing democratic development is widely viewed as the best chance for Western integration and for long-term economic prosperity and stability in the country,” the statement said. “The election of a representative, accountable and effective legislature is thus central to meeting Georgians’ hopes and aspirations.”

The Institute commended the Georgian people, election officials and observers for having contributed to a generally calm and orderly election process. “Notwithstanding serious problems, primarily in the pre-election period, the electoral process allowed citizens to make informed choices and express their will at the ballot box,” NDI said.

Members of the NDI delegation, from seven countries, visited more than 100 polling stations in all regions except Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti.

“Georgian voters went to the polls in large numbers,” NDI said, “demonstrating once again their desire for democratic governance. Representatives of multiple, competing political parties were present in the vast majority of polling places, as were nonpartisan citizen election observers, thus providing the transparency and a further basis for confidence in the character of the voting and counting.”

Leading the NDI delegation, which included former ambassadors and parliamentarians, representatives of nongovernmental organizations and regional specialists, were U.S. Rep. Gregory Meeks of New York, a member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and ranking member on the Subcommittee on Europe and Eurasia; former U.S. Rep. Sam Gejdenson of Connecticut, a member of the NDI board; Per Eklund, former ambassador of the European Union delegation to Georgia and a senior fellow at the Stockholm Institute for Security & Development Studies; and Kenneth Wollack, president of NDI.

The delegation visited Georgia from Sept. 26 to Oct. 3 and met with candidates, government and election officials as well as representatives of political parties, civil society, the media and the international community. They drew on the [findings of an NDI pre-election mission](#) that visited Georgia in June to assess the political environment and election preparations, as well as the analysis of [NDI long-term observers](#) who have been in the country since the beginning of August.

The Institute noted that today’s statement is preliminary, pointing out that official results tabulation is not complete and there may be complaints to be resolved. It said it will continue to monitor the process and issue further reports when appropriate.

The mission was funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development. Also with support from USAID, NDI assisted the efforts of nonpartisan citizen groups to monitor the election process.

NDI is a nonprofit organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide through citizen participation, openness and accountability in government.

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