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NDI Poll: EU and NATO Support at a Five-Year High; Urgent Action on the Environment and Improvements in Public Education Needed

TBILISI – Poll results released today by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and CRRC Georgia show the plurality of Georgians (38 percent) believe the country is going in the wrong direction. Key issues, including the court system, corruption, crime, jobs, poverty, territorial integrity, and prices, are also evaluated as moving in the wrong direction. However, issues of freedom of speech, healthcare, EU and NATO membership, media independence, and education are viewed as slightly improving. NATO and EU membership support is increasing, with NATO at 78 percent, its highest approval since 2013, and EU at 83 percent.

Nationwide, pollution remains the second most important local issue, 22 percent, following roads (35 percent). People are most concerned about following environmental issues: air pollution (57 percent), food safety (44 percent), and the presence of hazardous materials and toxins in products (40 percent). Residents of Tbilisi identify environmental pollution as the number one issue at 48 percent, followed by the cost of utilities (38 percent) and traffic (32 percent).

“While some issues, notably NATO and EU approval, are viewed as moving in the right direction, there remains an urgent need for policymakers to address a number of issues that affect citizens, including a problematic justice system, rising crime, and a weak economy,” said Laura Thornton, NDI global associate and senior director. “Further, alarming concern about environmental degradation requires immediate policy changes and investment, with an assurance that resources are not reduced given the reduced status of the Environmental Ministry.”

Half the national population assesses the government’s job performance on education as “good,” with rural residents most satisfied at 58 percent. Conversely, 57 percent of Tbilisi residents evaluate the government poorly on this issue. With regard to the skills and knowledge of teachers, a majority believes them to be average (43 percent) or good (42 percent). Private schools outrank public schools slightly on all of the following: safety, infrastructure, quality of education, extracurricular activities, preparation for university, and preparation for workforce. A large majority, 73 percent, of respondents believes hiring outside tutors is essential to pass national exams, 47 percent says it is essential to study well at school, and a majority (55 percent) also thinks it essential to pass final high school exams. At the university

level, state schools are viewed as having a small advantage over private institutions. Education is not viewed as a key factor in getting a good job, where the plurality (37 percent) of Georgians believe connections matter most.

“While the overall assessment of the education system is mixed, the perceived need for tutors demonstrates that schools are not viewed as adequately preparing students for success,” said Thornton. “Improvements are needed in public education, particularly to equalize educational attainment between those who can afford private schools and/or tutors and those who cannot.”

NDI surveys public opinion to help Georgian stakeholders diagnose and address issues of public concern by providing accurate, unbiased and statistically-sound data. This poll aims to capture the most relevant information to foster the development of responsive policies and governance. A wide range of leaders from across the political spectrum have reported that the polls are important to their work and encourage continued polling. The results reflect data collected from December 6-20, 2018, through face-to-face interviews with a nationwide representative sample of Georgia’s adult population, excluding occupied territories, that included 2,205 completed interviews. The average margin of error is +/- 2.1 percent.

NDI’s survey work is funded by UK aid from the British people.

This poll was carried out by CRRC Georgia.

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CRRC-Georgia is a non-governmental, non-profit research organization with a mission to promote evidence based debates on policy issues by providing reliable, up-to-date and accessible data and analysis. More information is available at <http://www.crrc.ge>