



## EUROPEAN UNION

### **OSCE Permanent Council No. 1343 Vienna, 4 November 2021**

#### **EU statement on the local elections in Georgia**

1. The European Union thanks the delegation of Georgia for informing the Permanent Council on the conduct of local elections in Georgia that took place on 2 and 30 October.
2. The EU commends the Georgian citizens for exercising their democratic right to vote in these elections, as well as the dedicated electoral staff and local observers, despite the challenging context of the COVID-19 pandemic. We welcome the fact that a fully-fledged International Election Observation Mission was deployed. The European Parliament and the EU Member States have also participated in the observation of these elections.
3. According to preliminary findings and conclusions of the International Election Mission, the Georgian local elections were generally well administered and the campaign was competitive. The contestants were able to campaign freely and both Election Days proceeded in an orderly manner. Nevertheless, the mission also noted that continued polarization coupled with escalation of negative rhetoric adversely affected the entire electoral process.
4. The EU regrets that a number of shortcomings were highlighted both after the first and the second round. These included widespread and consistent allegations of intimidation, vote-buying, pressure on candidates and voters, and an uneven playing field. More shortcomings emerged during the second round, such as the misuse of administrative resources and the violent rhetoric by political leaders, which further fuelled the already deep political polarization. Statements made before these elections, for example that the central

government would not cooperate with local councils should they swing towards another majority, are of particular concern, deemed as seeking to restrict the electorate's choice and to limit pluralism. The reported malpractices must not become the norm.

5. The EU took good note of the amendments adopted in the run-up to these elections which substantially improved the legal framework. It is important to address, in an inclusive manner, all outstanding ODIHR recommendations. A genuine reform of the judiciary is indispensable to increase trust also in the handling of electoral complaints. We deplore that these elections have been a missed opportunity in this respect.
6. The European Union remains unwavering in its support to Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. In this context, we deplore the fact it was not possible for Georgia's authorities to conduct these elections throughout the entire territory of Georgia, including in its regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. We also deplore that some Georgian citizens were prevented from crossing the administrative boundary line, thus depriving them of their right to vote.
7. We call on all parties to stay engaged in the electoral process. Public trust in its integrity requires an inclusive, credible and transparent recounting process and fair adjudication of complaints and appeals. In this regard, the Central Election Commission and the courts have a key responsibility in the days ahead.
8. We expect that genuine efforts will be made by Georgia's leaders to build a political climate conducive to meeting the expectations of the citizens of Georgia. This includes fulfilling repeated commitments on meaningful reforms, notably in the judiciary, as well as resuming the implementation of our agreed EU-Georgia agenda, based on the EU-Georgia Association Agreement and our shared values of democracy, respect for human rights and upholding the rule of law.

The Candidate Countries the REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA\*, MONTENEGRO\*, SERBIA\* and ALBANIA\*, the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

\* Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.