



Final Report on Meetings Conducted throughout Georgia

In March and April of 2006, within the frameworks of the Majoritarian Project financed by the British Embassy, Transparency International Georgia together with majoritarian MPs of the Parliament of Georgia conducted meetings in their respective district offices (meetings were held with the local population, members of local governance bodies, etc.) in all nine regions of Georgia aimed to inform the public and find out their opinions about the new laws on:

- local self-governance;
- property of the local self-government body;
- Election Code (part concerning the elections of a local self-governance body);
- state pension;
- state compensations and state academic stipends

The project aims at promoting closer relations between the members of Parliament and constituents and the enhancement of participation of public in the legislative process.

Meetings were conducted in the following regions/rayons/towns: **Shida Kartli** (Kaspi, Karaleti, Surami Valley, Liakhvi Gorge, Eredvi, Kareli); **Guria** (Ozurgeti, Lanchkhuti, Chokhatauri), **Imereti** (Zestaponi, Sachkhere, Kharagauli, Terjola, Baghdati, Kutaisi); **Kakheti** (Sagarejo, Sighnaghi, Lagodekhi, Gurjaani, Dedoplistskaro, Telavi, Akhmeta, Kvareli); **Mtskheta-Mtianeti** (Mtskheta, Dusheti, Akhalgori, Tianeti); **Kvemo Kartli** (Bolnisi, Dmanisi, Tetrtskaro, Rustavi, Gardabani); **Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti** (Tsageri, Ambrolauri, Oni, Lentekhi); **Samtskhe-Javakheti** (Adigeni, Aspindza, Akhaltsikhe, Borjomi); **Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti** (Chkhorotsku, Senaki, Tsalenjikha, Khobi, Zugdidi, Abasha, Poti).

Comparatively high attendance of MPs was registered in Kakheti, Mtskheta-Mtianeti, Shida Kartli, and Kvemo Kartli, and the lowest – in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, Imereti, and Samtskhe-Javakheti. *A detailed report on the activities of majoritarian MPs will be prepared in the end of June and distributed throughout the entire territory of Georgia in the form of newspaper inserts.*

At the meetings during the discussion of legislative innovations, practically identical problematic topics were raised by the public participants. The following variety of remarks and opinions were expressed with regard to them:

Low Level of Public Awareness

At almost all meetings conducted, the public participants, among them representatives of local self-government themselves (members of Sakrebulo and Gamgebelis) expressed dissatisfaction with the low level of their awareness and in most cases of its absence with regard to legislative innovations. The public demands to be actively included in the process of discussing laws. While discussing legislation, participants complained about hearing about changes in legislation only after the law has been adopted.

General Dissatisfaction with Changes Anticipated by Law

In most meetings the public expressed its general dissatisfaction with the conceptual approach toward legislation. In most cases the non-existence of the concept on local self-government became



the subject of criticism. Local self-governance should not be developed without a specific plan and making changes in haste will have negative effects. Similar attitudes were expressed about the other laws that were introduced at the meetings.

When adopting a law, it is essential to conduct an economic, legal, and social analysis that will serve as the basis for final elaboration the law. In the participants' opinion, this type of analysis is not been conducted for the laws presented at the meetings, otherwise, many legislative changes would not have been adopted in the existing form.

In our meetings the public expressed its dissatisfaction with the distortion of the idea of decentralization. They favor the direct election of mayors and gamgebelis. If the situation stays as it is, it will be impossible for the public to choose its own representation or express its will. Complete decentralization of the Sakrebulo has not been carried out either. The population is dissatisfied with the fact that people are not entitled to dismiss the Sakrebulo on the basis of the following grounds:

- a) The number of Sakrebulo members has been reduced to less than half;
- b) The Sakrebulo was unable to elect the Gamgebeli (Mayor) during a two month period;
- c) The Sakrebulo did not approve the budget of a self-governing unit composed in accordance with the rule prescribed by Georgian legislation within two months of its adoption of a state budget.

Problems related to the unification of a self-governing unit

At all meetings that were conducted the population seemed unanimously dissatisfied with the legislative amendment that relates to the unification of self-governing units and a new system of administration. In accordance with the new law on "local self-government," unification of self-governing units occurs together with the establishment of the notions of a "self-governing town" and a "self-governing municipality." Namely, according to points 2 and 3 of article 21:

- The number of Sakrebulo members of a self-governing town is determined by ten members elected with a proportional system and five members elected with a majoritarian rule in a respective town.
- The number of Sakrebulo members of a municipality is determined by one member elected according to the majoritarian rule in every community of a respective municipality and ten members elected according to the proportional system at the entire territory of the municipality.

Due to the mentioned amendments the majority of the meeting participants expressed their concern that the unification of Sakrebulo and Gamgeobas will distance local government from the population. Because a rayon Sakrebulo will have only one administrative center (respectively, also the staff), people will have to travel long distances to the administrative center in accordance with the new law. (For example, if Dusheti region has 18 Sakrebulo in accordance with the present data, it will have only one in order to comply with the new law). Therefore, the local government's ability to deliver services to the population will be diminished because the majority of the population does not have even minor sums of money for transportation due to grave economic conditions. The situation is even more complicated for mountainous populations, who are hindered by multiple factors in addition to economic ones.

Problems related to the institution of government representative ("rtsmeunebuli")

The institution of representative has changed in accordance with the new law. According to article 42 of the law, a representative "is a public official of local self-government, who is appointed for a one year term and dismissed from office by Gamgebeli (Mayor) in accordance with the Law of Georgia concerning public service."



According to the public, the transformation of the position of representative into one appointed by the Gamgebeli will reduce its meaning. The public had a negative attitude towards reducing the functions of representatives and granting them only the informatory/mediatory function, effectively reducing their role to that of messenger. In this form, the representative will not be able to assist people in any way because he does not have the power to issue any document and does not have a stamp or any other official capacity. Therefore, the public does not see the necessity for the existence of the institution in this form.

Necessity for criteria regulating optimization of self-governing units

It was mentioned that the law does not provide specific criteria for the reduction, increase, or other form of optimization of self-governing units. No concept exists at an internal level of a self-governing unit in order to carry out identical changes.

Dissatisfaction with unpaid Sakrebulo members

The public expressed its dissatisfaction with the fact that Sakrebulo members will not receive a salary. Participants demand that Sakrebulo members be paid. Otherwise, majoritarian/proportional elections lose their meaning and Sakrebulo become organs created only to elect Gamgebelis.

Dissatisfaction related to pensions and state compensations

The public is not satisfied with the new law on state pensions. The law does not provide different pension categories according to length of time spent working. At the same time the new law established a uniform pension age and made no exceptions for mountainous populations. As for state compensations, the people who will receive them are a limited number of public servants. The public is also dissatisfied with the radical discrepancy between the rates of pensions and compensations: the law establishes 560 GEL as a maximum limit for compensation and the minimum pension is 38 GEL (which will come into force only since September, 2006).

Other social problems

Many other problematic issues were raised at the meetings due to grave economic and social conditions existing in the country.

One of the major problems mentioned is that common power meters in regions still divide power fee equally among every citizen without any form of differentiation. Citizens want private meters that gauge only their household's use.

A lack of internal infrastructure and unemployment increases poverty in the regions.

The lack of water in the regions is a problem for the population. The majority of regional populations emphasizes the poor quality of drinking water. The situation is especially dire in the Sagarejo region where there have been cases of oil leaking into the drinking water.