

Monitoring of the participation of religious organizations and clergy in the pre-election campaign

(13.09.2021 – 21.09.2021)

The Democracy Research Institute monitors the participation of religious organizations and clergy in the campaign of the local self-government elections. Taken separately, observation of the behavior of election entities is not in the interest of our research. However, we cannot but assess how the pre-election campaign is impacted by the reports spread three weeks before the election, according to which, the State Security Service secretly wiretaps a wide circle of people, including the clergy of all ranks, likely without proper legal basis. At this point, due to the relatively short time passed since the data was made public, it is early to talk about the results of the observation, although we can notice a possible change in the behavior of political entities.

The leaders of the United National Movement responded to the secret surveillance of the clergy on the second day after the release of the footage, on September 14, through a Facebook address. Mikheil Saakashvili and Nika Melia blamed Bidzina Ivanishvili for planning and conducting the surveillance. According to Saakashvili, Ivanishvili has always been "very irritated" by the Georgian Church and "has always been a personal enemy of the Patriarch."¹

Former Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia took a relatively neutral position. Some of the events of the For Georgia party had been attended by the clergy, although no such activity could be observed after September 13.

The leaders of the Georgian Dream completed the nomination of mayoral candidates in Shida Kartli with unchanged practice. Prime Minister Gharibashvili kept visiting temples. Clergymen were still present at the nominations of the Georgian Dream candidates.

The Alliance of Patriots of Georgia expressed support to the Patriarchate.

On the other hand, even though high-ranking clerics had not been very active beyond the pre-election events before the release of the secret records, archpriest Jacob made political statements after the release of the records and accused Giorgi Gakharia of receiving political benefits by spreading the records. Archpriest Andria Jagmaidze termed the dissemination of information allegedly obtained as a result of the overt surveillance as "pre-election manipulation."

Georgian Dream

¹ Address of Mikheil Saakashvili, published on 14.09.2021, available at <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=871160780432813>, last accessed on 23.09.2021.



Within the framework of the pre-election campaign, Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili completed the process of nominating the Georgian Dream mayoral candidates in the Shida Kartli region. The Prime Minister, traditionally, visited churches and monasteries under construction together with the party members.

On September 14, the Georgian Dream candidates were nominated in the yard of the Gori Cathedral. The Prime Minister nominated the mayoral candidates of Gori, Kareli, Kaspi and Khashuri at the ceremony² (see Annex #1). The meeting was traditionally attended by the clergy (see Annex #2).

On the same day, September 14, Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili visited the St. Nicholas church under construction. The Prime Minister met with Surami and Khashuri Bishop Svimeon at the church. The Prime Minister was accompanied by Parliament Speaker Kakha Kuchava, Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Environment and Agriculture Levan Davitashvili, Minister of Regional Development and Infrastructure Irakli Karseladze and State Representative in Shida Kartli Valerian Mchedlidze. Bishop Svimeon informed the guests about the construction of the temple and stressed the importance of the temple. According to him, the New Bana, which is analogous to the Bana of Tao-Klarjeti, is being built by the joint efforts of the Church and the State³ (see Annex #3).

On September 14, Irakli Gharibashvili visited the Easter Church under construction in Gori, where he met with Ateni Metropolitan Andrea. According to the information spread by the official Facebook page of the Government of Georgia, the construction of the dome and the central arch of the temple was funded by the Cartu Foundation, while part of the work was done with the help of the local municipality and with temple donations⁴ (see Annex #4).

United National Movement

The reports of covert surveillance were responded the very next day by the leaders of the United National Movement - former President Mikheil Saakashvili and party chairman Nika Melia via Facebook. Both politicians accused Bidzina Ivanishvili of trying to discredit and destroy the Church. According to him, Ivanishvili had the task of "destroying all the authorities that would compete with his power" from the day he came to power.⁵ According to Melia's briefing, Ivanishvili had a particularly aggressive attitude towards the Georgian Orthodox Church, which "has been the most trusted institution in the country for years and enjoyed the highest authority." The briefing was clearly aimed at "protecting" the "victim" - the Church and the clergy - from Bidzina Ivanishvili in order to win over

² Irakli Gharibashvili's official Facebook page, publication date: 14.09.2021
<https://www.facebook.com/GaribashviliOfficial/posts/414336096717844>, last accessed: 21.09.2021.

³ Government of Georgia (Facebook page), publication date: 14.09.2021
<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=saved&v=335341244948990>, last accessed: 21.09.2021.

⁴ Government of Georgia (Facebook page), publication date: 14.09.2021,
<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=saved&v=258372002955634>, last accessed: 21.09.2021.

⁵ Government of Georgia (Facebook page), date of publication: 14.09.2021,
<https://www.facebook.com/Nika.Melia5/videos/4451913794876395>



the Orthodox parish; According to Melia, Ivanishvili's regime should be severely punished for "trying millions of believers and attempting to shake their faith."⁶

Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi, Irma Inashvili - Alliance of Patriots of Georgia

The Alliance of Patriots responded to the covert surveillance files released a few weeks before the elections by criticizing the ruling party and non-governmental organizations. At the same time, the party expressed support to the Church and the clergy.

On September 15, Malkhaz Topuria, the majoritarian candidate of the Alliance of Patriots in the Saburtalo district, responded to the secret surveillance of the clergy in the Night Studio programme, saying that "the largest amount of money is received in the form of grants for discrediting the Church."⁷ (See Annex #5)

On September 16, the party's mayoral candidate, Giorgi Lomaia, spoke about the secret surveillance via the Obiektivi Media Union. He criticized opponents, Government and NGOs for trying to weaken the institution of the Church and religion. According to Giorgi Lomaia, the Church, which is "the only restraining force against losing our identity" has been hit.⁸ (see Annex #6)

On September 16, Irma Tskhoragauli, the majoritarian candidate of the Alliance of Patriots in the Vake district, spoke about the covert surveillance in the At the End of the Day programme and blamed non-governmental organizations, the Public Defender and Petre Tsaava⁹ in addition to election opponents.

Pre-election political statements of the clergy

Bishop Jacob of Bodbe made political statements and criticized election entities on September 16, following reports of covert surveillance. He told Imedi TV that disseminating the recordings made by the State Security Service and discrediting the Church would make the Georgian Dream lose votes;¹⁰

⁶ Ibid.

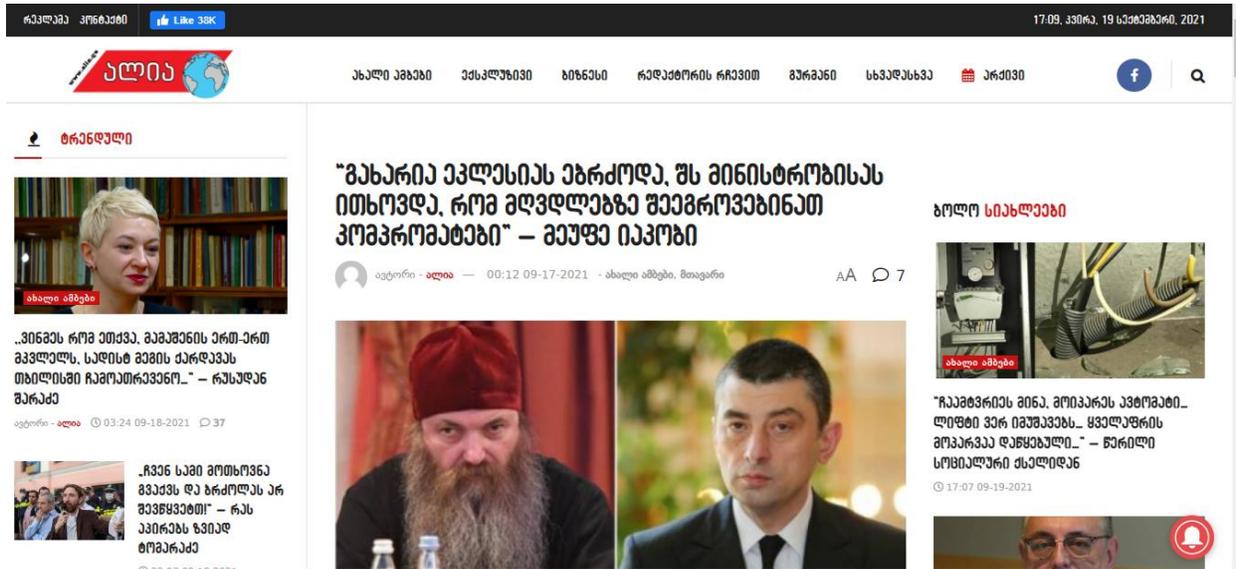
⁷ Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi, Irma Inashvili, Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, Facebook page, date of publication: 15.09.2021, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=614382856391919>, (last accessed: 22.09.2021)

⁸ Obiektivi Media Union, Facebook page, date of publication: 16.09.2021, <https://www.facebook.com/obiekti/videos/1187058588467180>, (last accessed: 22.09.2021)

⁹ Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi, Irma Inashvili, Alliance of Patriots of Georgia, Facebook page, date of publication: 16.09.2021 <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=890801848198854>, (last accessed: 22.09.2021)

¹⁰ TV Imedi, date of publication: 16.09.2021, https://www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=search&v=835738867114872&external_log_id=0565940f-0df5-4f52-80b6-7dfca79c00e4&q=%E1%83%98%E1%83%9B%E1%83%94%E1%83%93%E1%83%98%20%E1%83%98%E1%83%90%E1%83%99%E1%83%9D%E1%83%91%E1%83%98, [last accessed: 18.09.2021]

He linked the disclosure of the covert surveillance recordings to Giorgi Gakharia and called it pre-election manipulation. According to him, it was the demand of Giorgi Gakharia to collect discrediting information on the clergy.¹¹



"You remember that I made a statement earlier that the then Minister of Internal Affairs, Mr. Giorgi Gakharia, asked high-ranking officials of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, to collect discrediting information about priests and clergy. [...] I stated absolutely publicly and then a lot of people, even from the Government, denied something like that. I have made remarks about this person many times. [...] I was telling the truth, because some of those, who were instructed by Giorgi Gakharia, told me about it and I also checked it and it was absolutely true and since then I have been feeling their breath everywhere. The order was coming from Giorgi Gakharia, but I do not know who gave instructions to him, probably not someone inside the country," the Bishop said on September 16.

¹¹ Alia.ge, date of publication: 16.09.2021 <https://www.alia.ge/gakharia-eklesias-ebrdzoda-shs-ministrobisas-itkhovda-rom-mghvdlbze-sheegrovebinath-kompromatebi-meuphe-iakobi/>, [last accessed: 18.09.2021]



"If this alleged surveillance discredits the Church, he [Giorgi Gakharia] will take away the votes of the Dream. You know that they are talking about 43%. It is true that the Dream said that it no longer has a plan to hold early elections if there is less than 43% [in the elections], but it will probably be important for foreign countries as well. Gakharia has entered a field where he wants to take away the votes of the Dream and I cannot criticize him for that. However, where was Gakharia when we changed the Government in 2012? Who should follow his ideas? He would simply take away some of the votes of the Dream," - Bishop Jacob said in an interview published by the Tabula online magazine.¹²

According to the materials prepared by various media outlets on the basis the September 16 TV programme, Bishop Jacob said that Gakharia was "the man of Moscow and fought against the Church."¹³

¹² Tabula.ge, date of publication: 16.09.2021, <https://tabula.ge/ge/news/673116-meupe-iakobi-gakhariaze-eklesiis-diskreditatsiit?fbclid=IwAR0OnZIDgf3WqeKMLeEgHbrhmsnq6KFAhlC74v389pvi1f8M2tH4F3w1gW4> , [last accessed: 18.09.2021]

¹³ Report.ge, date of publication: 17.09.2021, <https://report.ge/society/gakria-moda-meue-iakobi/?fbclid=IwAR2KIz9QdRvRIUVZ2zIqNBD9ck4kKsohtvN7TBPIBuRuCgIefGsrHnli1E> , [last accessed: 18.09.2021]

გახარია მოსკოვის კაცია, ეკლესიას ებრძოდა - მეუფე იაკობი

17 სექტემბერი, 2021 00:07



ნინოწმინდის ბაგშეთა პანსიონის ხელმძღვანელი, ბოდბელი ეპისკოპოსი მეუფე იაკობი აცხადებს, რომ ყოფილი პრემიერ-მინისტრი და პარტია "საქართველოსთვის" თამბუქომარე გიორგი გახარია "მოსკოვის კაცია".

"მე აღრე გავაკეთე განცხადება, რომ მაშინდელი შინაგან საქმეთა მინისტრი, გიორგი გახარია შსს-ს მაღალი თანამდებობის პირებისგან ითხოვდა მღვდლებზე და ზოგადად სასულიერო პირებზე შეეგროვებინათ კომპრომატები", - განაცხადა მეუფე იაკობმა.

კითხვაზე, უცდია თუ არა მას გახარიასთან შეხვედრა, მეუფე აცხადებს, რომ ამის სურვილი არ ჰქონია.

"მასთან შეხვედრა არასდროს მსურდა იმის გამო, რასაც აკეთებდა. იმასაც გიდასტურებთ, რომ ეკლესიას ებრძოდა. ალბათ გუნდმა ერსაც უნდა მოუხადოს ბოდიში, რომ ასეთი კაცი გაეპარათ და ჰყავდათ გუნდში", - განაცხადა მეუფე იაკობმა "იმედის" ეთერში.

კომპანია შპს "საბაგო", სომხეთის, ა. ი. ხოლო, ნინოწმინდა არასწორი ჩანსოთი რასპორტი Ctrl + Enter



ბოლო სიახლეები

შენც ხომ გაცხს გაკეთებული აბორტი და შენთვისაც ვილოცებთო - ხათუნა სამნიძე
19 სექტემბერი, 2021 23:59

გამაონა გამოფინილი დოკუმენტების მოცულობამ - ნინო ლომჯარია
19 სექტემბერი, 2021 23:37

დადიანის გამზირზე მომხდარი ავარიის დროს ქვეში ავტომობილი დაზიანდა
19 სექტემბერი, 2021 22:17

მიტროპოლიტი სერგი Covid 19-ით გარდაიცვალა
19 სექტემბერი, 2021 22:10

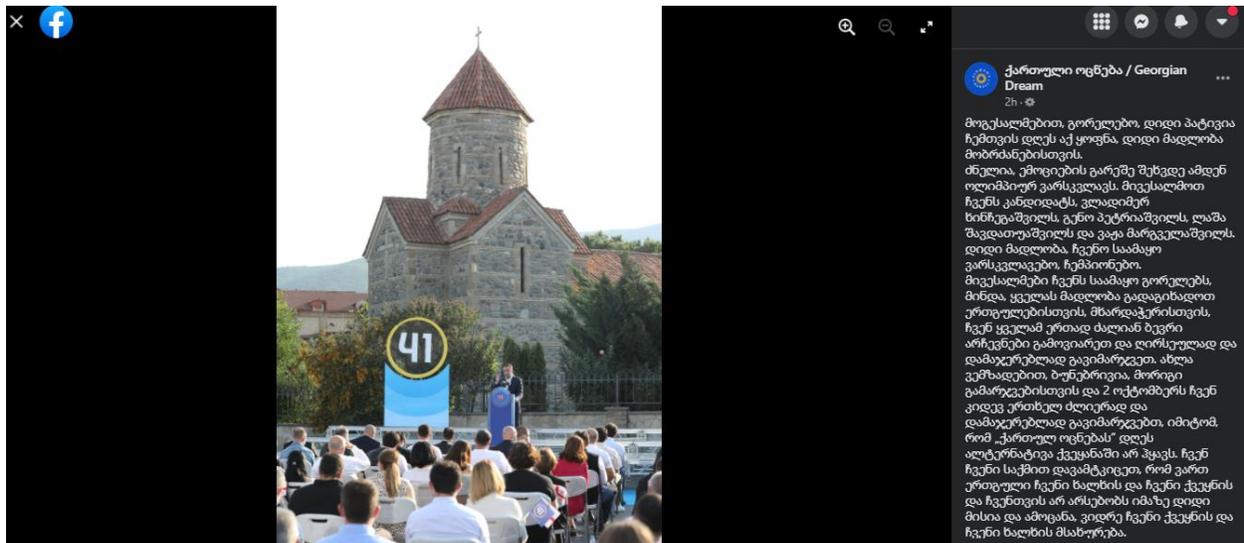
Archpriest Andria Jaghmaidze regarding the release of covert surveillance recordings

The Patriarchate also responded to the spread of scandalous materials of covert surveillance carried out by the State Security Service. Archpriest Andria Jaghmaidze, head of the public relations department of the Georgian Patriarchate, said that there was a political interest behind the spread of those scandalous files and that it was pre-election manipulation.

"There is an increasingly clear impression that the forces involved in the disclosure of the details of the alleged covert surveillance are trying to manipulate the Church factor in the elections." "The details of the alleged illegal surveillance and then the alleged illegal disclosure need to be investigated, and when there is more or less clarity, it will then be possible to draw conclusions or make comments. Before that, many things are vague and lies and truth are mixed up.¹⁴

¹⁴ Heralds of Patriarchate, Facebook page, (14.09.2021), <https://www.facebook.com/sap.uwyebaNews/photos/a.127386075337274/608260433916500/>, [last accessed: 21.09.2021]

Annex #1. Nomination of mayoral candidates in the Gori Cathedral



Annex #2. Clergy are present at the presentation of mayoral candidates by the Georgian Dream in Gori



Annex #3. The Prime Minister at the St. Nicholas Church under construction



Annex #4. Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili visited the Easter Church under construction in Gori.



Annex #5. Malkhaz Topuria - Alliance of Patriots of Georgia



დავით თარხან-მოურავი, ირმა ინაშვილი, საქართველოს პატრიოტთა ალიანსი [Follow](#)
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Annex #6 Alliance of Patriots of Georgia - Giorgi Lomaia



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