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Európsky parlament Evropski parlament Euroopan parlamentti Europaparlamentet

H.E. Mamuka Bakhtadze  
Prime Minister of Georgia

Brussels, 2 April 2019

Dear Prime Minister,

We, the undersigned Members of the European Parliament, are writing to you to urge a prompt and thorough investigation to the case involving political pressure on the school principal of Zugdidi's Public School No. 6 Mrs. Ia Kerzaia and in order to clarify the reasons that lead to her death on December 9, 2018. It is our knowledge that days before Mrs Kerzaia suffered a stroke, which eventually resulted in her death, she publicly stated and also informed the Public Defender of Georgia of an intense pressure with the purpose of joining the campaign to the then ruling party-endorsed candidate, Salome Zurabishvili, and now President of Georgia. More recently, ISFED (International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy), a Tbilisi-based election watchdog, indicates that the circumstances surrounding the November 2018 inspection in the Zugdidi's Public School No. 6 raises doubts that the inspection mechanism was used for political purposes ahead of the Presidential elections and constituted a case of intimidation and harassment<sup>1</sup>.

In fact, we are aware that the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia carried out seven school inspections in 2018, six of which were conducted in November, between the first and the second rounds of Presidential elections, including the one concerning the Public School N6 in Zugdidi. Moreover, according to Mrs Kerzaia's family, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia dispatched two inspectors to Zugdidi after the school principal refused to cooperate with the authorities. The inspectors released their conclusion two weeks later, recommending the school's governing board to dismiss Mrs Kerzaia.

As you are aware, the final report released by the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission referred both to the fact that "the campaign was marred by harsh rhetoric"<sup>2</sup> and to the "increased misuse of administrative resources further blurred the line between party and state"<sup>3</sup>. Another element raised concerns and raised in the same report concerns the fact that "numerous ODIHR EOM interlocutors reported that the ruling party coupled this mechanism [of mapping political preferences of voters] with pressure and intimidation especially on public sector employees and groups dependent on state allowances"<sup>4</sup>.

It is our sincere hope that the Georgian government will address all the shortcomings identified in the OSCE/ODHIR Final report. We believe it is in the best interest of Georgia and its

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<sup>1</sup> ISFED, *Final Report of Monitoring of the 2018 Presidential Elections*, Tbilisi, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> OSCE/ODIHR, *Georgia: Presidential Election (28 October and 28 November 2018) - ODIHR Election Observation Mission - Final Report*, Warsaw 28 February 2019, p.1, available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/georgia/412724?download=true>

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.27



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democratic future that the case of Mrs Kerzaia is investigated in a comprehensive and timely manner by the Prosecutor's Office and the judicial authorities in the country, so that the perpetrators are brought to justice. The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia should also clarify the standards and methodology of school inspections and refrain from using such mechanism in the pre-election period.

In fact, we, friends of Georgia in the European Parliament, expect that the government of Georgia ensure that no public servant becomes subject of any pressure in any forthcoming election campaign and, in that regard, we believe that it is of the utmost importance to clarify the circumstances around the case of Mrs Kerzaia.

Sincerely,

Ana Gomes (S&D)  
Michael Gahler (EPP)  
Rebecca Harms (Greens/EFA)  
Nathalie Griesbeck (ALDE)  
Julie Ward (S&D)  
Alyn Smith (Greens/EFA)  
Tunne Kelam (EPP)  
Bart Staes (Greens/EFA)  
Tania González Peñas (GUE/NGL)  
José Inácio Faria (EPP)  
Jean Lambert (Greens/EFA)