

**Analysis of the Questionnaire
Related to the Work of Majoritarian Members of Parliament of Georgia**

1st Round

Introduction

The questionnaire analysis is part of ISFED's "Active Citizens – Accountable Government" project that aims at promoting active citizenship by enhancing citizen participation in decision-making process and increasing the accountability and transparency of the Members of Parliament and government in general.

The goal of the questionnaire is to evaluate the working conditions of majoritarian MPs, their constituency outreach, as well as their satisfaction with the work of the Parliament. In addition, the questionnaire will provide citizens with information on the location of MP offices, their contact information and citizen reception hours. ISFED will run and publicize the results of the questionnaire four times a year. Thus, citizens will have the opportunity to evaluate the work of MPs based on concrete information.

At the same time, we hope that the questionnaire will help numerous organizations that work in this field or would like to support it in the future, to identify the main problems majoritarian MPs are facing in their work.

Although contacted numerous times by ISFED representatives, 13 MPs did not wish or were not available to complete the questionnaire. We hope that they will recognize the role of this questionnaire as a tool that can help them in their work, and therefore we invite them now to participate in the upcoming second round of the questionnaire.

Sincerely,
Tamuna Zhvania
ISFED Executive Director

Summary of the Findings

Majoritarian MPs are the bridge between citizens and the central government. Therefore, it is very important how effectively these MPs communicate with citizens, and how the citizens' needs are advocated before the Parliament.

The findings of the questionnaire showed that majoritarian MPs are experiencing problems that are most definitely obstructing this communication and their work in constituencies.

The problems can be categorized in four major groups:

- a) The functioning of MPs' constituency offices
- b) Relations with citizens
- c) Parliamentary work
- d) Working in the constituency

a) The functioning of majoritarian Members of Parliament constituency offices is hampered by inadequate finances.

Many ISFED coordinators have noticed that majoritarian offices do not have adequate furniture, and that the majority of them do not have a generator, which makes it almost impossible for the office to function, given the fact that the shortage of electricity is still a significant problem facing many regions of Georgia. Moreover, most offices need to be repaired so that acceptable working conditions (i.e. supply of heat and water) are provided to the staff working in local offices.

A great majority of offices do not have a computer, which most definitely decreases their efficiency. Moreover, some offices that have a computer do not have the access to the Internet or e-mail, which indicates that the use of modern technology is inadequate.

In addition, the staff of many constituency offices is under-qualified, largely due to the inability of the offices to provide sufficient salaries to its staff. Thus, many MPs stressed the importance of capacity building.

b) Although working conditions vary from office to office, every constituency should be provided with an example of how the office should function during parliamentary non-session weeks, as well as with best practices on constituency outreach.

Despite contrary assurances of many MPs, an in-depth analysis of the questionnaires revealed that most MPs do not have a fixed time for receiving citizens. Rather, MP offices receive citizens on a daily basis, and the MPs themselves meet with citizens quite infrequently.

MPs presented two major reasons to explain this inconsistency. Firstly, they argued that the existing Parliamentary schedule does not provide enough time for MPs to meet with their constituents. Secondly, MPs pointed to the overwhelming number of laws that are being discussed in the Parliament. Many MPs stated that they do not have enough time to read all received materials. The significant distances some MPs have to travel to meet with their constituents affects their productivity in lawmaking and in their interactions with citizens, which are their two main responsibilities.

c) A great majority of MPs are satisfied with the work of the parliament, but they have identified several areas in which the work of the parliament could be improved. Considering the Parliament's demanding schedule, it is not surprising that over a half of the MPs think that more time should be allocated to MPs for legislative discussions, and that the soliciting for citizen's inputs should be enhanced.

d) A great majority of MPs stated that the issues they have raised on local problems before the Parliament were in most cases fully or partially solved. However, a very small number of MPs indicated that they have initiated a law or an amendment that was subsequently adopted by the Parliament, which indicates that majoritarian MPs are more active in solving local problems than in legislative drafting.

Considering the Parliament's demanding legislative schedule, one may conclude that MPs are doing their best to participate in meetings with constituents. Although MPs are actively involved in town hall meetings, they usually do not discuss specific legislation, and rather concentrate on various social and infrastructural problems.

Methodology

The questionnaire was developed by the International Society for Fair elections and Democracy (ISFED) and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI). It was run from October 15, 2004 to January 15, 2005, by 75 ISFED rayon coordinators who approached constituency offices of majoritarian Members of Parliament with the request to complete the questionnaire. Those MPs who were not reached at their constituency offices, received the questionnaire in their Parliamentary offices.

According to the Constitution of Georgia, there are 85 majoritarian Members of Parliament elected in single mandate constituencies (rayons). Out of 85 rayons in Georgia, the 10 majoritarian Members of Parliament from Abkhazia and South Ossetia were not elected in November 2, 2003 elections, and therefore, the questionnaire was not administered in those territories. In addition, Kobuleti, Batumi and one Tkibuli MPs' mandates were not confirmed by the Parliament; the Schuachevi MP passed away. Therefore, currently there are 71 acting majoritarian MPs in Georgia.

Out of the 71, ISFED representatives were able to collect completed questionnaires from 58 MPs (81,69 %). This analysis is based on the answers provided by majoritarian MPs or their authorized staff. All percentage calculations of the analysis are based on 58 MPs.

Questionnaires were not obtained from Akhalkalaki, Ambrolauri, Baghdati, Gori, Khelvachauri, Khulo, Langodekhi, Martvili, Ninotsminda, Poti, Saburtalo, Zestaphoni, and Zugdidi.

Some MPs provided reasonable explanations as to why they did not wish to participate in this round of the questionnaire. In two rayons (in Gori and Zestaponi), MPs elected in October 2004 decided not to participate in the questionnaire claiming that they would not be able to provide informed answers on all the questions. In Poti and Zugdidi, MP offices are currently under construction. Since the emphasis of the questionnaire lies on the work of MPs in their constituencies, the lack of an operational office obviously

prevents the MPs from implementing their duties effectively and keeping the public informed about their work.

ISFED will run the questionnaire 4 times a year, which will enable the organization to measure improvements or setbacks in the work of majoritarian MPs and their working conditions. All results will be published on a quarterly basis and presented to the public.

Analysis

1. General Information

The questionnaire was filled out by 81,69 % of all majoritarian MPs (58 out of 71). Taking into account that this is the first systematic approach to the evaluation of the work of majoritarian Members of Parliament, ISFED is content with this turnout.

2. Questions related to the constituency office and working conditions of MPs

94,82% of constituency offices are open; it seems that an insignificant number of MPs experienced problems with local government in securing the office space.

18,96% of MPs consider their working conditions to be unsatisfactory and 75,86% of MPs think that their working conditions need to be improved.

53,44% of MPs think that funds allocated from the budget are not sufficient for the functioning of the bureau; 60,34 % of them stated that the effectiveness of their offices would increase if they had more staff; and 84,48 % consider that the effectiveness of the bureau would increase if the staff was paid higher salaries.

58,6% of the constituency offices have more than three employees. 79,30 % of MPs think that their staff needs more expertise in order to fulfill their duties.

65,51% of the constituency offices do not have a computer, and 27,58 % have one or two computers. 87,93% of the offices do not have access to the internet and 63,79 % do not have an e-mail address by which citizens can contact them.

12,06% of MPs work in their offices 1-2 days per month; 37,93% work 3-5 days, 13,79% of MPs work 6-10 days, and 27,58 % work 10-14 days a month in their constituency office.

Findings: *The functioning of the constituency offices of majoritarian Members of Parliament is hampered by inadequate finances. The amount provided from the state budget for the bureau is 250 Lari per month. We believe that this is hardly enough to cover the salaries for the staff, and the cost of office supplies and logistics.*

Many ISFED coordinators remarked that majoritarian offices do not have adequate furniture, and that the majority of them do not have a generator, which makes it almost impossible for the office to function, given the fact that the shortage of electricity is still a significant problem facing many regions of Georgia. A vast majority of offices do not have a computer, which most definitely decreases their efficiency. Moreover, some

offices that have a computer do not have access to the Internet or e-mail, which indicates that the use of modern technology is inadequate.

In addition, the staff of many constituency offices is under-qualified, largely due to the inability of the offices to provide sufficient salaries to its staff. Thus, many MPs stressed the importance of capacity building trainings for the staff in different fields.

Although working conditions vary from office to office, every constituency should be provided with an example of how the office should function during parliamentary non-session weeks, as well as with best practices on constituency outreach. However, it is not clear, given the Parliament's legislative schedule, how MPs whose rayons are far from Tbilisi, can manage to work 10-14 days per month in their local office. On the other hand, majoritarian MPs from Tbilisi and nearby rayons are in a better position to participate in the activities of the constituency office as they do not have to travel long distances. Some MPs stated that although they work in their constituency offices only one or two days per month, they receive citizens in their offices in the Parliament.

3. Relations with Citizens

89,65% of MPs stated that they have more or less established a time when they receive citizens; 5,17 % have not. According to the answers, over 50% of MPs receive citizens more than 5 days per month and 39,65% of MPs receive citizens less than 5 days per month.

41,37% of MPs receive more than 50 citizens per month; others receive less.

All MPs receive letters and complaints from citizens, react to citizens' letters and complaints and request answers from relevant state services and bodies. 51,72 % of MPs have experienced problems in this process, while 46,55 have not. Out of those MPs who experienced problems, 36,20% stated that state bodies do not respond on time, which indicates that state bodies are not always meet their legal obligations.

All MPs provide citizens with the answers they receive from relevant state institutions and bodies. 70,68% of MPs do so on meetings and only one MP replies to citizens by e-mail.

Findings: *Although a vast majority of MPs stated that they have a set time for receiving citizens, when asked to specify that time, the answers varied from original assertions. Since some questionnaires were completed by the authorized staff of the constituency offices, some of the answers received indicated that MPs receive citizens every day, which is highly unlikely. Therefore, we made supplementary phone calls and found out that the majority of the offices receive citizens on a daily basis, without a specified time. However, MPs themselves, meet with citizens on a much more infrequent basis. According to the answers provided, regular meetings with citizens are vital as direct meetings with citizens have proven to be a much more popular way of exchanging information than telephone calls for instance. We believe that if MPs had established a fixed time for receiving citizens, the number of citizens received would have increased significantly. .*

MPs provided two major reasons for not having fixed reception hours for citizens. First, they argued that the existing Parliamentary schedule does not provide enough time for MPs to meet with their constituents. During the spring and the fall parliamentary sessions, every other week is a session week, which MPs are required to attend. The intermediary weeks are committee weeks, during which different drafts are discussed in committees. If an MP misses three committee meetings in a month, special procedures are considered to lower his/her salary according to Parliament's Rules of Procedures. In addition, often special parliamentary sessions are called on short notice during non-session weeks or holidays, and committee meetings are called on weekends.

The work of majoritarian Mps in constituency offices is also hampered by the amount of laws discussed in the Parliament. Many MPs stated that they do not have enough time to read all received materials. We believe that this affects their productivity in both lawmaking and citizen outreach, which are their two main areas of responsibility.

Although understandably it is quite hard for MPs to establish fixed hours for receiving citizens because of the uncertain Parliamentary schedule, we believe that majoritarian MPs and Parliamentary structures should take this issue into further consideration.

4. Parliamentary work

65,51% of MPs are satisfied with the work of the Parliament, while 27,58 % are not. 24,13% of MPs think that Parliament's work can be improved by having more qualified staff, 20,68% point to the advancement of technical equipment as a means of improving Parliament's work, and 10,34 name enhancing the Parliament's research component.

65,51% of MPs are satisfied with the agenda of the Parliament, while 24,13% are not. 36,20% believe that the agenda can be improved by providing more time to MPs for legislative discussions, 18,96 request that more time be allocated for public discussions and the soliciting of citizen participation.

56,89% of MPs think that the Parliament's priority should be laws related to local government; 53,44% name the tax code and 24,13% opted for the law on territorial-administrative arrangement of Georgia.

87,93% of MPs present the issues raised in their respective rayons for parliamentary consideration. Some of the issues raised include gas, electricity and water supply problems, rehabilitation of war veterans, aid to earthquake victims. 25,86% of MPs noted that there was no response from the Parliament; 53,44 % claim that the issue was partially or fully solved. MPs from Kazbegi and Sagarejo affirmed that the issue they raised was fully solved. MPs from Borjomi, Khoni and Mtatsminda stated that as a result of their initiatives, a legislative amendment or a new law was adopted on the raised issues.

84,48% of MPs consider that further education will assist them in their work and half of them would like to improve their research skills.

Findings: *A great majority of MPs are satisfied with the work of the parliament, but they have identified several areas in which the work of the parliament could be improved. Considering the Parliament's demanding schedule, it is not surprising that over a half of*

MPs think that more time should be provided to MPs for legislative discussions and for soliciting citizen's inputs. This is another argument that could be utilized for changing the Parliament's agenda and providing majoritarian MPs to spend more time soliciting citizen's inputs in their respective rayons.

A vast majority of MPs stated that the issues they raised regarding local problems to Parliament were fully or partially solved. However, only an insignificant number of MPs indicated that they have initiated a law or an amendment adopted by the Parliament; this indicates that majoritarian MPs are more active in solving local problems than in legislative drafting.

We hope that both domestic and international institutions and organizations will be able to assist MPs meet their needs of educational advancement, as expressed in the questionnaire, which will greatly aid them in the effective implementation of their functions.

5. Working in the rayon

86,20% of MPs participated in town hall meetings since they were elected, and 67,24% more than three times.

44,82% of MPs participated in discussions on legislative drafts in their rayons. 36,20% claim that the demands of citizens were considered in the law, whereas 53,44% stated that they were not. The issues discussed include the tax code, privileges for mountainous regions, and general education.

94,82% of MPs addressed the local government with the aim of solving a local problem. 81,03% stated that local government paid proper attention to the raised issue, whereas 15,51 % believed that it did not.

Findings: *Considering the Parliamentary schedule, one may conclude that MPs are doing their best to participate in meetings with constituents. Although MPs actively participate in town hall meetings, they usually do not discuss certain legislation, rather raise numerous social and infrastructural problems. In that respect, the cooperation with local governments appears satisfactory.*

Recommendations: *In order to improve the working conditions of majoritarian MP constituency offices, more funds from the state budget should be allocated to the local bureaus. All offices should have at least one computer, a printer, a fax machine and a generator. The office environment should not depend neither on the personal wealth of the MP, nor on the personal relations of the MP with local government bodies. All offices should have at least minimum standards that should be funded from the state budget. This will ensure that all MPs receive equal opportunities for exercising their duties. As well, providing higher salaries and necessary trainings to the staff would increase the efficiency of the constituency offices.*

All majoritarian MPs should have a fixed time for receiving citizens, and constituency offices should use all available means (local TV, radio, newspapers, flyers etc.) to inform citizens where and when they can meet with their MP. In order to support the work of majoritarian MPs and enable them to meet with their constituents regularly, it is

necessary to consider changing the Parliamentary agenda. For instance, the Parliament could develop a fixed session schedule and agenda several months prior to the sessions. In addition, if parliamentary committees would have a defined time for their sessions or hearings at the beginning or at the end of the non-session week, majoritarian MPs would have more time to travel to their constituencies. Another option for solving this problem is to establish Saturdays as citizen reception days, which some of the majoritarian MPs are doing already. All of the abovementioned recommendations would also guarantee that more time is provided for legislative discussions and for soliciting citizen's inputs.