



TI Georgia welcomes Mayor Ugulava's recent commitment to transparency and accountability

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

15 April 2010

TI Georgia welcomes Mayor Ugulava's recent commitment to transparency and accountability. In a recent statement available at Civil.ge, Mr. Ugulava states, "I am personally committed as Tbilisi's mayor to doing everything possible to ensure this campaign and election set new standards for openness, transparency, and public confidence." Mr. Ugulava was responding to TI Georgia's analysis of the use of administrative resources in the run-up to local government elections slated for May 30.

Responding to several points Mr. Ugulava made during the speech, TI Georgia would like to take this opportunity to highlight what we view as significant areas of concern.

TI Georgia recognizes the Mayor's Office's obligations to its citizens regardless of whether or not it is a pre-election period. However, we repeat that it is for this reason we analyzed the use of administrative resources during both election years and non-election years to provide an objective picture of how their use changes. The resultant picture depicts an increase in public spending during election years. The alternative conclusion would be that not enough money was spent during non-election years and the Office is striving to make amends prior to the elections. Either way, election-year spending is significantly higher than non-election year spending.

An interesting point is that, yes, while the budget was finalized in December of 2009, unlike the early presidential and parliamentary elections of 2008 that were appointed after the approval of the 2008 state budget, President of Georgia made the statement about holding local May elections in July of the previous year. This gave the government enough time to include all the supplemental and attractive social programs in the originally approved state and municipal budgets.

Exclusively, only for Tbilisi population, pensions were increased prior to local government elections in 2006 and 2010. However, the mayor was correct in his rebuttal about public transportation cards -- in 2008 about GEL 25.9 million was allocated for this purpose, in 2009 (a non-election year) GEL 17.6 million, while in 2010 we see GEL 24.4 million.

We would ask the Mayor, however, to also comment about the spending on medical vouchers. This year's figures reflect a tremendous increase in spending for this purpose. While in 2008, 1.70 million lari was spent, in 2009 GEL 15,300 was spent. However, this year GEL 3 million is allocated for medical vouchers and marks almost a doubling of that in 2008 and 196 times that of the previous year.

TI Georgia would like to thank Mr. Ugulava for his willingness to increase the openness and transparency of the Office of the Mayor. We also hope that the Office will provide information according to the recent Freedom of Information (FOI) requests made by TI Georgia in compliance with Georgia's Administrative Code, which have been unsuccessful so far.

Recent FOI requests to the Mayor's Office include:

- detailed information about the budgets, number of employees and programs implemented by the Mayor's Office, including several city projects;
- information about how public funds were used in the construction and renovation of the Office of the Mayor's new building; and
- information about the ownership of street newspaper kiosks.

TI Georgia invites the office of the Mayor to continue to engage civil society in an open forum and invites the Office of the Mayor to work together to increase the level of openness and transparency, so citizens can discern how public funds are spent both during elections and beyond. This would contribute to public confidence in the Mayor's Office's pledge that it is not mere words, but has merit.