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Presidential Elections in Georgia show that there are serious flaws in the electoral system which must be urgently corrected

The Spokespersons of the European Green Party today gave their evaluation of the Presidential Election held in Georgia on Saturday January 5th 2008.

EGP Co-Spokesperson Philippe Lamberts said: "We European Greens acknowledge that the elections held in Georgia have generally been recognised as broadly fair and democratic by international observers, including delegations from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the European Parliament, whose delegation was headed by the **French Green MEP Marie-Anne Isler-Béguin**. However, we do have serious concerns about both the electoral campaign and the election process itself. Our member party, the Green Party of Georgia, has informed us that they identified several discrepancies on electoral lists, including names of deceased persons, duplication of names and nonexistent constituencies. The Georgian Greens and other opposition parties claim that the influence which the government has over the judiciary means that such irregularities will most probably not be investigated properly. Media coverage of the election campaign was extremely biased in favour of the incumbent Mikheil Saakashvili and the suspension of news programmes on independent TV stations as well as the closure of the IMEDI TV station as part of the state of emergency imposed temporarily just 2 months before the election also curtailed media freedom at a crucial time. In terms of the election process itself, several international observers, including the **Austrian Green MP Stefan Schennach**, noted serious problems at polling stations including a lack of clarity about which votes were valid. Concern and some surprise has also been expressed in some quarters in Georgia that some election observers felt it was appropriate to announce that they had judged the elections to have been fair even before all the votes had been counted. We are also concerned by reports that the implementation of social welfare programmes was often combined with campaigning for Saakashvili. Such allegations of violations of democratic principles must be thoroughly investigated and steps urgently taken to ensure that such violations are not repeated in the upcoming parliamentary elections. The Georgian government must immediately



take measures to ensure that state resources are no longer used for partisan purposes. The EU and other election observers and international bodies must remain vigilant and do everything in their power to ensure that Georgia adheres to the highest democratic standards."

EGP Co-Spokesperson Ulrike Lunacek continued: "In terms of the result of the election itself, we very much hope that President Saakashvili will see the dramatic decrease in his electoral support from 94% in 2004 to roughly 52% in 2008 as a clear signal that many Georgians are deeply unhappy with his increasingly authoritarian way of governing and that he will endeavour to govern in a much more inclusive way than has recently been the case. Saakashvili polled particularly badly in Tbilisi and this is a result of the anger felt by many people there as a result of the violent suppression of peaceful demonstrations in November 2007. President Saakashvili must demonstrate that he has learnt that democratic leadership is not just about contesting and winning elections but also entails allowing the free expression of opposition and dissent. We hope that the legislative elections in April will show further improvement in the Georgian authorities' democratic standards. We would also like to express our wholehearted support for our member party, **the Green Party of Georgia**, and hope that they are able to make progress in the upcoming elections. The Georgian Greens will be campaigning on the urgent need for reform of the electoral system and the judiciary and greater media freedom. Another key issue for the Georgian Greens is the Georgian Government's plans to build a nuclear plant in Georgia. This would be an extremely dangerous and retrograde step and we support the Georgian Greens' campaign against it. "
