



INSTITUTE FOR DEVELOPMENT OF  
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION



Policy, Advocacy, and Civil Society Development in Georgia (G-PAC)

საჯარო პოლიტიკის, ადვოკატირებისა და სამოქალაქო საზოგადოების  
განვითარება საქართველოში

# Project Final Report

The research is prepared in the frames of the project “Development of e-Participation in Georgia”.

The project was implemented by “Institute for Development of Freedom of Information” (IDFI), in cooperation with “Center for Post-Soviet Studies” (CPSS), with the financial support of the grant “Partnership for Change”, within the framework of the USAID program of “East-West Management Institute” “Public Policy, Advocacy and Civil Society Development in Georgia” (G-PAC).

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## INTRODUCTION

From 1 June 2012 to 31 May 2013 “Institute for Development of Freedom of Information” (IDFI), in cooperation with “Center for Post-Soviet Studies” (CPSS) was implementing a project “Development of e-participation in Georgia” with the financial support of the grant “Partnership for Change”, within the framework of the USAID program of “East-West Management Institute” “Public Policy, Advocacy and Civil Society Development in Georgia” (G-PAC).

The purpose of the project was, based on the research and analysis of the best international examples and practice of e-governance and e-participation, familiarizing the Georgian society with the necessary tools for enhancing the level of their involvement in political planning and to find the ways to adopt and improve the government/civil platforms in order to assist development of modern e-communications in Georgia.

In order to achieve this purpose, the organization planned to meet a number of goals/implement tasks:

- Considering the international experience to prepare a research about the necessary techniques, innovative projects and platforms that are important for providing e-participation and e-involvement;
- To define the components of e-involvement used by the Georgian public institutions and political parties and find out the existing challenges by studying the communicational elements of their web-sites and their social networks;
- To elaborate recommendations for Georgian public structures by studying foreign examples and mechanisms of e-participation;
- Based on the mentioned recommendations, to advocate the development of modern means of electronic format of communication between the society and Georgian government through the governmental web-resources and e-participation;
- To inform the citizens about the importance of e-involvement and the existing resources and mechanisms with the help of social networks and new technologies.

- Organize discussions in order to increase trust between the society and the public structures and enhance communication between them, to improve the already implemented initiatives and encourage new ones;
- To monitor the election campaign covered by electronic media.

## ACTIVITIES IMPLEMENTED IN THE FRAMES OF THE PROJECT

In order to meet the aims and purposes of the project, team carried out various activities: research, monitoring, elaborating recommendations and providing interested individuals with them, conducting survey, preparing information videos, organizing discussions and meetings, caring out information campaign, advocacy. Bellow we present the activities in details, achievements and recommendations elaborated based on them.

### MONITORING AND RESEARCH

The major subjects of research were public institutions, political parties and media outlets on the first stage of the project. In the frames of the project, team monitored the web-pages and Facebook pages of 23 public institutions, 8 political parties, three public figures and Facebook pages of 8 media outlets.

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#### SUBJECTS OF RESEARCH

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##### GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

1. Government of Georgia;
2. Parliament of Georgia;
3. The Administration of the President of Georgia;
4. Ministry of Defense of Georgia;
5. Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia;

6. Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia;
7. Ministry of Agriculture of Georgia;
8. Central Election Commission;
9. Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources;
10. Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia;
11. Tbilisi City Hall;
12. Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia;
13. Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees of Georgia;
14. State Audit Office of Georgia;
15. Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia;
16. Ministry of Environment Protection of Georgia;
17. Ministry of Justice of Georgia;
18. Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs of Georgia;
19. Ministry of Corrections and Legal Assistance of Georgia;
20. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia;
21. Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia;
22. Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reintegration;
23. Ministry of Finance of Georgia;
24. Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Diaspora Issues;

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#### POLITICAL PARTIES/FIGURES

1. New Rights Party
2. Davit Bakradze
3. National-Democratic Party
4. United National Movement
5. Ivane Merabishvili
6. Shalva Natelashvili
7. The Republican Party
8. Coalition “Georgian Dream”
9. Our Georgia, Free Democrats
10. Christian-Democratic Movement

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#### MEDIA OUTLETS

1. Rustavi 2
2. 9<sup>th</sup> Channel
3. Maestro
4. Imedi
5. Kavkasia
6. Public Broadcaster

During the preparation period research team elaborated the methodology: Monitoring methods Facebook pages were based on various academic researches on social networks. While in order to elaborate the standards of assessing the communicational mechanisms of the web-pages, project team used the 2012 research of the United Nations and “Evaluating the Parameters of Information Transparency on the Official Web-pages of Public Institutions” prepared by IDFI in 2011.<sup>1</sup>

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#### MONITORING OF FACEBOOK PAGES

Monitoring of Facebook pages lasted for one year and the report was prepared in three stages: before parliamentary elections<sup>2</sup>, after the elections<sup>3</sup> and the final report. Based on these reports we can make the following conclusions:

- During the monitoring process government institutions showed progress in this sphere. The majority of the institutions that had closed Facebook walls and were unavailable to be contacted via Facebook message, already fixed the problems and provided more tools for communicating with the citizens. Also, public institutions became more active in interacting with the citizens. Most of them frequently respond to the questions and comments of the citizens.
- It must be noted that government institutions that significantly improved communication with the citizens via social networks used to attend the discussions that

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.idfi.ge/?cat=monitoring\\_method\\_1](http://www.idfi.ge/?cat=monitoring_method_1)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.idfi.ge/?cat=researches&topic=56&lang=ka>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.idfi.ge/?cat=researches&topic=60&lang=ka>

were held in the frames of this project. These meetings were intended for the PR department representatives of public institutions. Research team was familiarizing them with the results of the project, detected problems, elaborated recommendations, while guests shared their opinions. The attendants confirmed that they were getting acquainted with the results of IDFI monitoring, attempting to improve the flaws. Together with other institutions above mentioned concerns the following government agencies: Ministry of Environment Protection, Central Election Commission, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Internal Affairs and State Audit Office of Georgia.

Despite the above mentioned, problems and challenges remain:

- In most cases the official Facebook pages fail to provide the history of the institution, mission of the page and contact information. None of the pages provide the moderation and commenting policy. The latter is widely spread practice on official Facebook pages of various government institutions all over the world.
- The majority of the monitored institutions do not provide interactive and interesting applications (blog, forum, poll etc). On part of the pages, research team detected applications with technical flaws.
- It turned out that Facebook page administrators have no consistent strategy of sharing news on page. Administrators very rarely use visual and easily observable mechanisms.
- Responding to public and private messages of citizens still remains one of the biggest challenges. Very often administrators do not pay attention to the comments of the users. They never attempt to encourage the discussion about various issues on social networks.

On the bases of the problems detected after monitoring, IDFI elaborated the recommendations which might be useful for the representatives of the PR departments of the institutions in order to improve their communication strategy with the citizens. This document was delivered to every public institution, as well as the political parties and media representatives. It is notable that the above mentioned recommendations were based on Georgian reality as well as international practice (the USA).

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#### MONITORING OF THE COMMUNICATIONAL TOOLS OF THE WEB-PAGES

The monitoring of web-pages of government institutions and the e-services they provide, displayed several tendencies:

- In most cases government institutions use their official pages inefficiently. This e-resource is not perceived as tool of communicating with the citizens and providing their involvement in political processes.
- Mainly institutions just share news about their own activities and pay less attention to evaluating the activities and getting feedback. Very few of the institutions provide calendar of planned activities on their web-pages. In case the calendar is available, it just provides the information about already held meetings and activities. This is not enough for citizen participation in the process of decision making.
- The majority of the institutions do not provide the e-communication and public relation action plan and strategy. This indicates the inconsistent approach of the institutions towards this issue.
- Monitored web-pages lack applications and recourses that are oriented on bilateral interaction (blog, forum, petitions, discussion, poll, voting). In case they provide such services, administrators of these web-pages mostly leave the comments of the users without response;
- Web-pages of Georgian public institutions gained the lowest rates in e-decision-making component which is the last one out of three components of e-communication (e-information/communication, e-consultation and e-decision-making). This indicates that the institutions do not attempt to provide citizen inclusion in discussions and planning process, to conduct online consultations simultaneous to working out strategic documents and consider the views of the society via interactive services.
- The majority of the institutions do not keep the list of questions and letters sent via official e-mail address. Thus it is impossible to control the communication quality. The same problem was detected regarding the online contact forms. The number of responses from the government institutions is quite low.

In order to evaluate the strategy of communicating with the citizens, the quality of utilizing e-resources and level of communication, project team requested public information. Questions regarded public relation action plan, the number of official web-page users; the statistics of registered online service users, questions sent by citizens via online communication tool as well as the responses they received from the institution.<sup>4</sup>

The responses, received from the government institutions displayed the following tendencies:

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.idfi.ge/?cat=researches&topic=87&lang=ka>

- Monitoring detected number of problems regarding communication as well as access to the information. Communication tools are not paid enough attention from the page administrators; in most cases, government agencies do not keep the list of letters received via e-mail;
- Very often government agencies do not possess the information regarding the number of webpage users;
- The majority of the institutions have not elaborated the public relation strategic plan.
- Positive tendency was also detected: the responses from the government agencies display that improving communication with the citizens is becoming a priority.

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#### COMMUNICATION WITH THE GOVERNMENT AGENCIES VIA TELEPHONE

In order to display the complete image of public institutions in terms of openness and transparency, project team conducted a telephone monitoring. This experiment included all the above mentioned institutions. Monitoring team was calling the hot lines (in case the institution had one) as well as the official phone number indicated under the contact department of the web-pages. Based on the conducted experiment and the response of the institutions, IDFI created the rating of communication quality of public institutions.<sup>5</sup>

In general, monitoring displayed that in most cases, connecting to the institution via telephone is not a problem. Project team received responses to almost all questions as the representatives of the institutions were attempting to give complete answers within their competence or redirect user to the relevant department. However, monitoring also detected various problems that need to be solved:

- Only five out of 25 institutions have the hot line number: Tbilisi City Hall; Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia; Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees of Georgia; Ministry of Justice and Central Election Commission; The Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia display the contact telephone number on the home page of their web-site which makes communication easier.
- The official web-page of the State Chancellery does not provide the telephone number of PR department. Available phone number belongs to the Main Chancellery (citizen letters and official correspondence). Every department, including the PR department has

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.idfi.ge/?cat=researches&topic=106&lang=ka>

its own numbers, however, the information is not available on the web-site; voice-mail does not redirect the users while the Main Chancellery often do not provide the contact information of PR department.

- In the beginning of the research the contact telephone of the Ministry of Defense was unavailable on the web-site; however, after renovating the web-page, this information became available.
- The web-page of Ministry of Finance provides the contact number of the minister and the deputy ministers, but the telephone of PR department is not available.
- The majority of the institutions do not use the voice-mail service. During the research, operators of the monitored institutions did not specify the title of the institution except the State Ministry for Euro-Atlantic Integration. We believe that institutions must pay attention to the formal side of communication.
- One of the last positions in the rating is the Parliament of Georgia. Voice mail, responsible for redirecting the user, is not available. Even though the web-page provides the numbers of all the departments, heads of the departments and other employees, it may be difficult for the citizens to find this information as the contact category of the web-page only provides the number of Main Chancellery.
- Contacting with the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees of Georgia and Ministry of Justice turned out to be the biggest problem. It must be noted that telephone communication became easier in May.

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#### CITIZEN PLATFORM ICHANGE.GE

One of the main products of the project is elaborating the concept of citizen platform. On August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2011 Georgia joined the international initiative “Open Government Partnership” in the frames of which Georgian government took responsibility in the fields of transparency and open governance. In particular, Georgian government considered the recommendation proposed by IDFI and civil society and took significant responsibility to create citizen platform in 2013 – [ichange.ge](http://ichange.ge).

Given the fact that Georgian government has taken the commitment to implement national portal in 2013, we believe that platform concept must be developed, approved and technically implemented urgently.

Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), based on the analysis of

international practice presented its vision of citizen platform, in particular – what kinds of functions and mechanisms it should provide. Using this concept in the process of implementing online platforms will significantly contribute to establishing modern standards of e-democracy in Georgia. Existence of such platform will considerably simplify the communication between the citizens and government as well as encourage public discussion on social problems.

According to the report, e-platform must consist of the three main parts: e-petitions, e-public consultations and e-democracy.

Together with the narrative, report includes visualized version of each procedure.

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#### ACCESS TO INTERNET IN GEORGIA

Effective usage of internet resources simplifies the bureaucratic procedures, enables direct communication between the citizens and government, exchanging opinions resulting in government openness and providing citizen participation in decision-making process. Regardless above mentioned advantages, the precondition of this process is widespread availability of internet and access. Otherwise, only limited number of the citizens will benefit from using these e-resources. In order to display the main tendencies of internet usage in Georgia, Institute for Development of Freedom of Information prepared research, based on the surveys conducted in Georgia and small online survey conducted by IDFI itself. It consists of the following parts:

- Statistics of internet users in Georgia;
- The importance of internet availability;
- Tendencies of internet usage;
- The results of IDFI survey;
- Survey on petitions, conducted by IDFI;

The results of the research displayed the following tendencies:

- Despite the growing number of the internet users, the majority of the population has no access to internet. Especially serious problems are detected in the regions.

- Part of Georgian population considers internet as less important communicational resource, while for others main obstacles that prevent them from access to internet are: lack of computers, lack of computer skills and little interest. Network-connected problems are especially widespread in the regions.
- Surveys have shown that the majority of the population use internet and social networks mainly for getting information; bilateral communication and expressing views is not a priority.
- Citizen activity is very low in terms of petitions and initiating their ideas. However, the majority of persons that took part in internet survey (the majority of respondents were socially active persons) expressed willingness for participating in decision making process in case the necessary mechanisms become available.

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#### LEGAL ANALYSIS

With the purpose of improving the problems in the field of e-participation and public consultation, it is necessary to harmonize and improve existing legislative frames. In order to propose ideas to the government, project team analyzed the international practice including the examples of USA, Great Britain, Canada, Japan, Portugal, Denmark, France, Germany, Netherlands, Mexico, South Korea, Ireland and China.

The analysis of government-citizen e-communication legislative frames displayed, that only part of administrative agencies attempt to legislatively regulate their service or communication-oriented work. Using the e-communication methods by several agencies cannot be considered as the final solution of the problem. In order to develop this field and create e-communication mechanisms, it is necessary to elaborate unified strategy for government and commercial sectors. It is important to define the direction of creating e-services.

The analysis of Georgian General Administrative Code displayed that it lacks the adequate procedures that make the access to information easier. It also fails in providing the involvement of all interested groups before starting administrative proceeding. Thus the project team, based on the best international practice, elaborated the recommendations in order to establish more transparent model of administrative proceeding.

## INFORMATION CAMPAING AND ADVOCACY

In order to raise citizen awareness regarding e-participation, project team has taken significant steps. Firstly, five videos were prepared. These videos inform population about the meaning of e-participation. Also, they describe the main forms of e-participation and show already implemented projects in this direction.

In particular, first video is called “What is e\_Communication?” and it visually depicts the term, the main techniques, services and applications that might be used for simplified communication with government.

The purpose of the following video – “petitions for Tbilisi City Hall” was to inform citizens about the online petition web-page initiated by the government of the Capital. This video aimed at making citizens more active in participating in decision-making process and proposing their initiatives to solve number of problems.

Third video, “Change the Law” was dedicated to the main procedures and functions of the web-page created by the Ministry of Justice – “Addition of Legislative Gazette and Statute Books of Georgia”. The main goal of the video was informing citizens about how they can participate in law-making process. It is notable that the web-pages of Tbilisi City Hall petitions and “Addition of Legislative Gazette and Statute Books of Georgia” have existed for over one year already, however, the activeness of the citizens is quite low. This may be caused by the lack of information and these videos were prepared in order to improve this problem. It is important that the latter video was posted on the official Facebook page of the Ministry of Justice.

The fourth video concerned the initiative “Open Government Partnership” (OGP). This is international initiative and aims at increasing citizen participation and government openness through utilizing modern technologies. Ministry of Justice has created the special category on its web-page, dedicated to this initiative. This page can be used as link between the citizens and the government, where citizens can initiate their ideas for further transparency of the government. Video attempted to let the population know about this important mechanism and encourage them for activeness.

The last video (Your Activeness for Change) depicts the importance of active citizen in the process of forming democratic institutes. Also, this video emphasizes why citizen involvement is important for achieving changes.

Together with creating the videos, it was also important to share them with the broad segment of the population. For this purpose, special multimedia category was created on the web-page of the organization in order to provide all the videos in one space. Videos were uploaded to the IDFI YouTube channel and were being constantly shared on Facebook. However, the project team did not limit the audience of the videos by internet users and attempted to make these videos available through TV as well. Organization addressed with five official letters to the Public Broadcaster in order to get permission to broadcast these videos free of charge with the status of social advertisement. IDFI's idea was accepted in all five cases. Also, TV channel "Mega TV" expressed interest in one of the videos and broadcasted it free of charge.

In order to increase the citizen participation in project and provide more information for them, project team created a blog, which systematically published articles and blog-posts. This strategy turned out to be very successful as the users were regularly being informed about the progress of the research and displayed tendencies. As a result, citizens had opportunity to receive information step by step and not to be dependent on the final researches. It turned out that spreading information concerning internet and e-participation was easier through short articles. Simultaneously, persons, interested in issue had opportunity to express their opinion in the commenting space at the bottom of the article.

In order to consider the opinion of citizens, media outlets, NGO sector and generally, civil society, project team conducted five public discussion before the final presentation. First discussion concerned the primary results of Facebook monitoring of public institutions, political parties and figures and media outlets. Discussion was public; any person could participate and share opinion with the research team. The second discussion was dedicated to meeting with the PR department representatives of public institutions. Project team presented the problems detected during the monitoring and proposed its vision of meeting these challenges. On the other hand, representatives of PR departments also shared their ideas, explained the reasons of mentioned problems and positively assessed the advice of IDFI.

Third meeting was also attended by the representatives of PR departments but this time we talked about the communication strategies of web-pages of public institutions. It is notable that the elaborated recommendations deserved positive assessments.

One discussion was conducted with the representatives of media. The aim of this meeting was familiarizing the project team with the experience of the media representatives in order to reflect their opinions in the final report.

The main issue of fifth discussion was citizen platform [ichange.ge](http://ichange.ge). Organization presented its' visions which was followed by the discussion with active involvement of attendants (representatives of media, NGO sector and public institutions).

Discussion was broadcasted through LiveStream. The remarks made by the attendants were taken into consideration during elaborating the final version of the concept.

For increasing the awareness of the citizens, IDFI distributed the informational flyers which visually depicted the positive sides of e-communication. Also, it presented the already implemented online tools and explanation of their usage. Flyers were distributed in Tbilisi and Kutaisi, mainly on the territory of universities.

One of the preconditions of successful advocacy campaign is informing and mobilizing the society. However, it is equally important to discuss these issues and cooperate with the decision makers. This was the main goal of the discussions conducted with the representatives of public institutions. In particular, the main objective of these meetings was on the one hand to share elaborated recommendations and main tendencies and on the other hand to consider the opinion of the attendants, get feedback and exchange views.

IDFI shared the experience and contributed with recommendations with the State Audit Office of Georgia in the process of elaborating the concept of institution's renovated web-page.<sup>6</sup>

Proposal from the government to IDFI to participate in forming the public relation strategy can be considered as another success of the organization. In particular, IDFI received the letter from the State Chancellery which stated that the government created public council to elaborate the public relation strategy. IDFI expressed readiness for cooperation and on the first stage provided government with the researches and recommendations elaborated in the frames of the project. Organization keeps active cooperation with the chancellery in various fields including e-communication, initiative "Open Government Partnership", taking steps towards increasing awareness and citizen participation.

IDFI also conducted meetings with the representatives of Ministry of Justice and State Chancellery concerning the issue of citizen platform [ichange.ge](http://ichange.ge). Currently IDFI and mentioned institutions are in the process of intensive negotiations to elaborate the ways of enacting this concept.

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<sup>6</sup> The web-page created with the participation of IDFI has not yet started functioning.

## RECOMMEDATIONS

In order to develop e-communication in Georgia, government must take effective steps. As the interaction is bilateral process, along with the political willingness, citizen activeness is important; thus effort of both sides is decisive. In the frames of the project “Development of e-Participation in Georgia” project team studied various aspects of e-democracy and e-participation through analyzing the examples of the countries that have serious achievements in this field. We present the recommendations elaborated based on the detected tendencies. These recommendations may contribute to the process of introducing e-services in Georgia.

- Firstly, government and public institutions must create the complete public relation strategic plan, identify priorities, plan activities.
- It is important to mark off the competences in PR departments of public institutions and define who will be responsible for administrating various communicational tools (web-pages, social networks, public information, e-services, petition, etc).
- Similarly to written correspondence, letters received through e-mails and online contact forms must be given official status. It would be desirable to create public registry similarly to the document registry.
- Institutions must keep records of questions, comments, complaints of citizens sent via various facilities (telephone, e-mail, social networks etc.) as well as responses. Institutions must define the exact dates and forms of response to citizen questions.
- In order to provide citizen participation in political processes and planning, it is important to implement various interaction-oriented services – blog, forum, petition, voting, public consultations with the help of which citizen participation in decision making will be guaranteed.
- Simultaneously to introducing e-services, institutions must make sure that applications have no technical flaws. In order to improve the service, public institution must take the advice of citizens and specialists, express readiness to cooperate and provide feedback which is easier through various communicational tools like polls, feedback forms, meetings, public discussions.
- In order to mobilize and encourage the activeness of the citizens, government must conduct effective information campaign and inform the broad segment of society about their rights and mechanisms they can use.
- According to the international responsibility, Government must urgently elaborate, adopt and technically implement the citizen platform [ichange.ge](http://ichange.ge).

- Working group must be set up in State Chancellery the main competence of which will be effective communication with citizens (including e-communication). This group must be responsible for creating and enacting citizen platform [ichange.ge](http://ichange.ge).

At the same time the analysis of Georgian and foreign legislative practice in terms of e-communication displayed that it is necessary to introduce international practice through making amendments in the General Administrative Code:

1. Before starting public administrative proceeding, preliminary publishing (including, posting on e-recourses) of the document is necessary.
2. It is necessary to introduce the “White Paper” procedure. In particular, after the reasonable time from starting the administrative proceedings, administrative body must prepare questionnaire where interested individuals of legal entities will express their views. Proactive public accessibility of the questionnaire (including e-recourses) must be provided.
3. General Administrative Code of Georgia does not define the publishing of normative administrative-legislative acts by non-collegiate administrative bodies through public administrative proceeding. Thus we believe that mentioned regulation should cover public administrative proceeding by collegiate as well as non-collegiate administrative bodies.
4. Proposed amendments must be reflected in the IX chapter of General Administrative Code of Georgia. In case of implementing amendments, better quality of administrative proceeding and citizen participation in decision-making process will be achieved. This, on the other hand will promote establishing the new standards of participatory democracy.