

# 15<sup>th</sup> SOUTH CAUCASUS MEDIA CONFERENCE

## Latest media freedom developments in Georgia

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- Georgia's media environment is **pluralistic** and competitive, but frequently **biased**;
- Latest **trends** of media developments are quite **negative** endangering the pluralistic environment in the Country;
- Controversial **statements** against critical media as well as **initiatives** and even **court's** decisions **hampering** free expression;

- **The constitution** and relevant laws guaranteeing the right to freedom of expression, including for the media, and citizens generally.
- Positive changes have been seen by amending the constitution aimed at increasing the independence of public broadcaster and media authority as well as introducing the right to access/use of the **internet** as **fundamental right**.

- **Leadership changes at Public Broadcaster** by the persons affiliated with the government caused legitimate public outcry;
- Results of the “**Audit Compliance Report**” found out financial and managerial problems in the broadcaster during 2015-2016, including the details on unreasonable expenditure of the budget, deficiencies in the procurements, tailor’s tenders and conflict of interests;
- Members of the Board of **Trustees** of the GPB elected by the ruling party frequently criticizing and even insulting the NGO, often using **hatred language** and disseminating **homophobic statements**;
- While the GPB was criticized for the failure to fulfil its mission, the **Adjara TV** has gradually started gaining the public trust under the new management.

- Pending trial at **Strasbourg** court over ownership dispute of **Rustavi 2** the most popular and influential pro-opposition outlets;
- Local and international NGO's as well as international organizations expressed serious concerns about procedural **shortcomings** during the related **proceedings** at the Georgian court, as well as about the court's independence;
- The company suffers financial problems;
- Number of employees even the authors of the popular reality shows have been rehired by the direct competitor Imedi TV;

- **Consolidation/concentration** of media power by merging three outlets, Imedi, Maestro GDS, loyal to the ruling party;
- **GDS** used to be owned by Bidzina Ivanishvili's son, **Bera Ivanishvili**;

**Arrest of two rap singers** over alleged drug charges after days of the release of a video critical of police. Following the demonstration the rappers were released and later declared not-guilty;

**Attempt to change the ownership of TV Pirveli** - The attempt was allegedly orchestrated by the government which was not satisfied with editorial policy of the station;

**Attack on Rustavi 2 Journalists** by the members of the Georgian Neo-Nazi group over the joke about the former primer minister's hobby of tree collecting hobby and Jesus Christ;

## Controversial initiatives:

- Controversial amendments to the **Law on Broadcasting** submitted to Parliament by the **GPB** management;
- Former member of the High Council of Justice **Eva Gotsiridze**, announced the initiative to restrict the freedom of journalists concerning the criticism of the judges;
- The initiative of MPs to amend the Law on **Culture and the Civil Procedure Code** was regarded as an attempt to legalize the censorship;
- Another attempt to adopt the **blasphemy law** (“Law on religious feelings”). This time the draft was presented by the member of the pro-opposition MP. The initiative was welcomed by the chair of human rights committee;
- Initiative of media authority concerning the obligation of the broadcasters to verify the **trustworthiness** and **objectiveness** of **opinion polls** is contrary to the best international standards and contains the threat of establishing the censorship environment in the country;

## Trial on Condom Design

- Upon the request of the **Tbilisi city hall** the court of the first instance banned the sale and **advertisement** of the condoms depicting among others the face of the **Georgian** queen;
- The decision was upheld by the court of appeal;

## Misinformation/Disinformation

- Like other countries Georgian public also face the challenges of so called “**fake news**”. There are number of media outlets and online/social pages regularly disseminating misinformation/disinformation targeting western countries, liberal values and undermining the democratic institutions.

Following the announcement of the Russian company **NTV plus** to enter the Georgian market prompted the heavy criticism regarding the Russian media, its propaganda as well as their links to the Russian government.

Several initiatives have been proposed how to oppose of Russian propaganda including the changes of the legal framework allowing to ban the Russian medias linked to the government.

## Internet Freedom

- There are no reports about the restriction or disruption of accessing to the internet or censoring the online content. However, there is growing concern about **unauthorized surveillance**. New surveillance laws introduced in 2017 have attracted criticism for allowing excessive access to user data.
- **Internet Penetration - 50.0%.**
- Main challenges: High prices for services, inadequate infrastructure and lack of internet literacy limits the access to the internet.

**Thank You for Your Attention !**