

# Latest media freedom developments in Georgia

## 16<sup>th</sup> South Caucasus Media Conference

**Ekaterine Basilaia**

Media Sustainability Index for Georgia (2011-2019)  
Country Research Advisor for Media Influence Matrix  
Tbilisi State University

10.10.2019

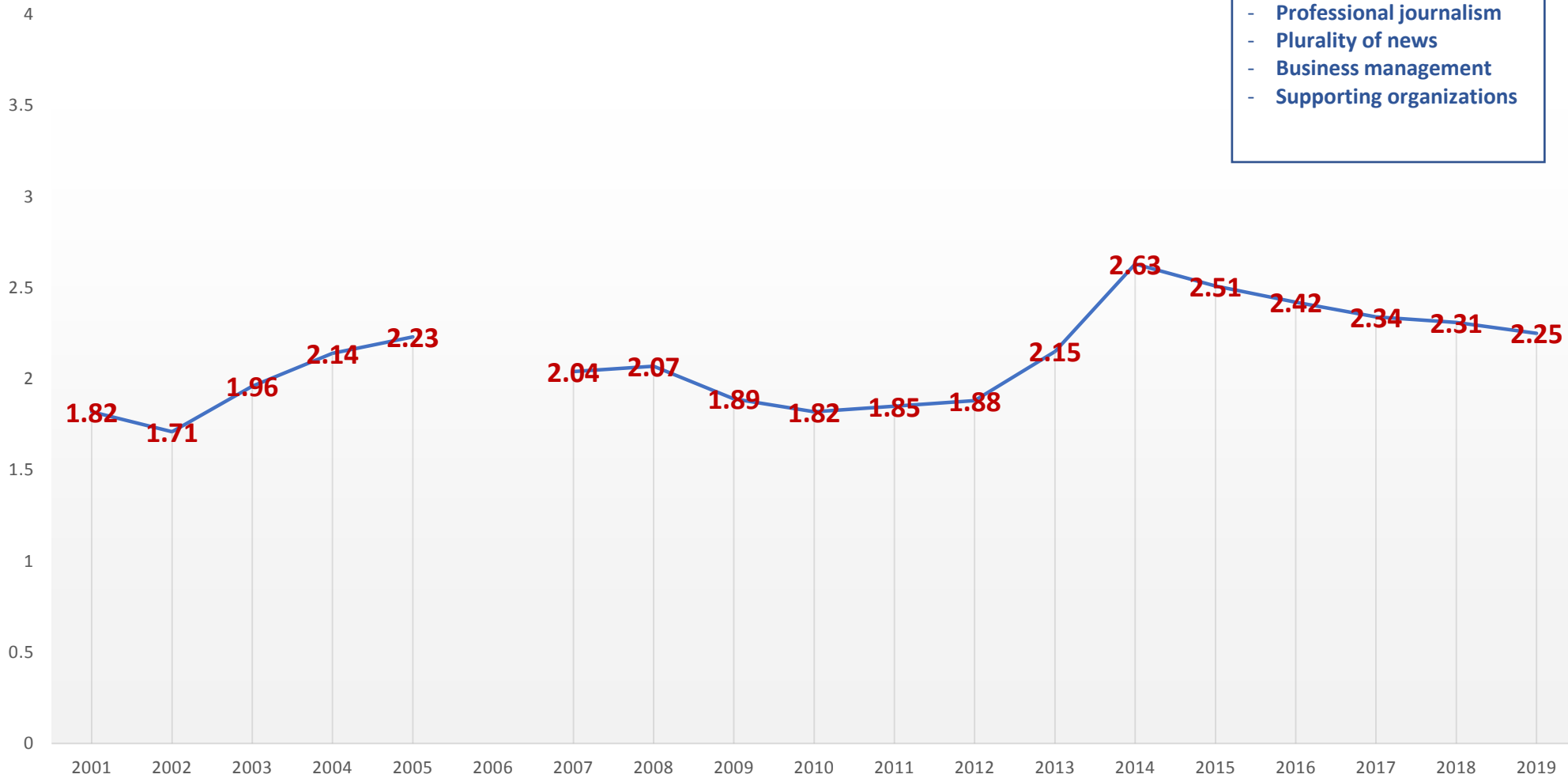
The Georgian constitution and laws pertinent to free speech and media meet internationally accepted standards.

The media landscape is pluralistic, however, political bias is present in mainstream media.

**Reporters Without Borders, 2019:** Georgia occupies 60<sup>th</sup> place out of 180 countries.

**Media Sustainability Index, 2019:** the country score 2.25 (near sustainability category).

## Time Trends: Overall MSI score for Georgia



- Freedom speech
- Professional journalism
- Plurality of news
- Business management
- Supporting organizations

**Scores:**  
**3-4** Sustainable system  
**2-3** Near sustainability  
**1-2** Unsustainable mixed  
**0-1** Anti-free press

# Controversial legislative initiative

Georgian National Communications Commission proposed revisions to the current Law on Broadcasting. The revisions, among some other topics, envisage that the issues related with hate speech addressed through self-regulation can be taken on an appeal to the GNCC or a respective court authority.

The media community and civil society caution that the revised law has the potential to become a tool for censorship.

## Preventing journalists from carrying out their work

- Journalists have seen their work hindered many times during the reporting year. 40 journalists were attacked and injured at the June 20 protests in Tbilisi.
- Their cases aren't being investigated under **the Article 154** of the Criminal Code, which prohibits any attempt or action preventing journalists from their jobs and classifies the actions against journalists as attacks on free speech.
- Several journalists were assaulted when covering the 2018 presidential elections.



*Source:*  
*Mediachecker.ge*

# Threats to media pluralism

*Rustavi 2 TV* went back to one of its former owners, who, at the same time is seen as an ally to the ruling political party.

- The director and several prominent journalists were dismissed. Mass departure of the journalists from the station followed.
- The channel's former director charged by prosecution with abuse of power and embezzlement.
- Some other staff members of *Rustavi 2* were also charged with improper financial activities.

On a separate case charges were brought against the businessman, whose family owns an independent media station *TV Pirveli* – raising suspicions about potential pressure on a critical broadcaster.

Local and international watchdogs warn against threats to fragile pluralistic media environment in the country.



# Public Broadcaster's 'backslide'

- Dismissal of the Director of Adjara Public Broadcaster evoked questions about the interference of pro-governmental forces in the editorial independence of the channel.
- During six months the station announced three calls to fill in the position. The fourth one was discontinued following the court ruling.

Failure to elect the director rises questions about attempts of some pro-government forces to influence the editorial policy of the channel.

## Polarization undermines credibility of the media

During the 2018 presidential elections one of the largest national television stations became a 'mouthpiece' for the ruling party while the largest pro-opposition channel was critical of it.

# Disinformation and fake news as challenges to trust in journalism

Different studies showed Facebook 'trolls' and fake websites extensively used pro-government narrative during the times critical for the ruling political party throughout 2019.

The social media monitoring carried out by ISFED during the 2018 parliamentary elections revealed extensive use of the Facebook pages and fake news websites.

# Internet freedom

Internet is free from regulation. In 2017, the Constitution of Georgia was amended to include a provision that considers access and free use of the internet to be a fundamental right.

In 2018 and 2019 the TV stations *Rustavi 2*, *TV Pirveli* and Georgian Public Broadcaster reported about cyberattacks. Disabling or paralyzing broadcasting installations, which rely on digital tools, poses challenge to the media activities.

**Thank you!**