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GEORGIAN PUBLIC BROADCASTING SERVICE

Public Broadcasting Service of Georgia was established pursuant to the Law on Broadcasting adopted by Parliament on December 23, 2004 and enacted on January 18, 2005.

I must say that a purely formal establishment of the PBS somehow had a negative impact on the Broadcaster's image because for nearly 8 months viewers could not see any substantial changes in Broadcasting operation. At that time, neither the Supervisory Board was elected, nor the new management appointed.

The beginning of the process of transition from State TV to Public Broadcasting is connected with adoption of the Law. However, actual implementation of the Law started last summer, when the Supervisory Board was elected and the new management appointed.

Since electing the Board and appointing the General Director, Public Broadcasting came up against a host of problems. These are the problems that hamper the PBS's progress and therefore call for immediate solutions.

One of the major problems is that even today it is extremely hard to identify all financial and material assets belonging to the Broadcaster. Formally declared indebtedness (in total amounting 14 million Laris) is subject to adjustments from time to time. Periodically, we are becoming aware of absolutely unknown creditors and unsubstantiated financial obligations. In brief, even at present we don't know exactly whom the Public Broadcaster belongs to. Moreover, not all the assets belonging to the Broadcaster have been returned. Due to this problem, the Supervisory Board can neither sort out program priorities, nor set the timeframe for their implementation.

Most importantly, this situation has a dramatic effect on the viewers' attitude towards the Broadcaster and its rating. During the last 2-3 years, the First Channel, now Public Broadcasting, used to cover ongoing public and political processes in a way that according to the new electronic rating system, relegated it to the third place (after "Rustavi 2" and "Imedi"). According to RHC, its share of TV-viewers' audience is quite low (6.8%). What's more, the channel does not retain its viewers' attention for too long.

At present, most of the problems facing us are related to signal transmission, operation of transmission service and a significant part of the country being beyond the coverage area. By the way, it is still impossible to size up the coverage area and to identify the existing technical facilities. It is noteworthy that for the Broadcaster, with its 2 TV and 3 radio channels, the problem of coverage is crucial.

I would also like to underline that the shortwave radio broadcasting that was disseminating information abroad, has been terminated due to technical problems.

In order to more clearly illustrate the routine problems the PBS is currently faced with, let me give you a few examples of technical conditions:

Airing / System problems – Airing is conducted from an outdated studio with linear equipment, where no server exists and news is aired from tape.

Cameras – News service has 17 DV Cam camcorders. Some are in a good condition, while most of the cameras need repairs. Regions are not provided with personal cameras, so regional journalists often borrow cameras from their colleagues in the regions of Georgia.

Editing suits – Two editing suits are mainly used by the journalists as these are the only suits being in the best condition. The problem is the heterogeneity of the editing kits and airing system. The computer editing is available, although no-one in the newsroom can use it properly. So, computer editing takes more time and journalists pressed by the deadline in most of the cases refuse to use it.

Control Room – Has problems with outdated equipment in a critical state of repair, which frequently fails. The problem is aggravated by lack of professionalism, motivation and discipline among the staff that is to air news programs daily.

Modernization of news service and improving the quality of the news bulletin are the new management's top priorities which now take precedence over everything else.

Changing the existing situation is connected with improvement of the material-financial conditions at the station. We are determined to vary our programs and to make them better-quality, more instructive, and entertaining. We are already busy preparing public, political and cultural talk shows, independent professional journalistic investigations, programs based on social themes, etc. But today the Broadcaster only produces news issues (I will further talk about this below), morning program "Adre" and the afternoon educative program "Sarchevi". At present, this is practically the only production of the Broadcaster. I would like to stress once again that taking into account the existing material and human resources, improving the quality of our news issue remains a top priority for the Broadcaster's management.

Many of the Broadcasters in Eastern European Countries were also faced with such problems early on. However, due to a proper and well-organized cooperation with their Supervisory Boards, precise assessment of their material and financial resources, optimal combination of financial as well as human resources has significantly changed those stations' activities for the better and most importantly had a positive impact on public and political life in those countries.

Thus, the existing situation has posed the following major tasks before the new management today:

- Introducing a new management concept at all levels;
- Converting the newsroom into digital format and implementing convergence newsroom principles;
- Ensuring transmission and high quality of the Public Broadcaster's signal throughout Georgia;
- Ensuring public participation in thematic programming of the Broadcaster;
- Diversified coverage of minority problems and their professional advancement;
- Systemization of the materials kept in video, audio archives and the Golden Fund, converting them into modern technological format and introducing it to the public.

As already mentioned above, due to the chaotic situation related to the Broadcaster's material and financial conditions, the Supervisory Board has not yet been able to identify program priorities and the timeframe for their implementation.

Nevertheless, the proposed list above and numbering of the tasks is clearly defined. As for ensuring professional journalistic standards, editorial independence as well as pluralistic and

diversified approaches in the news issues – these have been permanent priorities for the new management from the very outset.

New Management

At this stage, management structure has been agreed with and approved by the Supervisory Board.

Transforming the newsroom into digital format and implementing convergence newsroom principles

In order to make the problem clear and the strategy more understandable, I would like to draw your attention to the current situation in the news service and speak about the item in more detail.

The news service of the Public Broadcaster produces three TV news programs "Mtavari" (*Main*) daily: 18 minutes at 12.00; 30 minutes at 18.00 and 45 minutes extended news programs in the evening at 20.00. In addition the news service features two 5 minutes news inserts in the morning program "Adre" (*Early*). Besides News Service includes Radio News of the first radio, which produces radio news broadcasts at the top of each hour also operating the web-page within the framework of the same information policies. National minority news programs, aired daily (28 minutes, 15.00 pm) in different languages of the minorities living in Georgia–Azeri, Armenian, Ossetian, Abkhazian and Russian national news, go on the air once a week in each of these languages. Besides news service, the Public Broadcaster airs Russian brief daily 10 minutes following the minority language program.

Problems which call for urgent solutions

These are:

- Ineffective structure – there is no precise division of duties and responsibilities among staff members at all levels.
- Lack of discipline and sense of duty as well as lack of corporate unity and team spirit.
- Management problems of the different branches of the news service.
- News production standards and format not defined – decisions are made personally by the executives on a daily basis.
- News service permanently faces communications problems such as telephone communication or transportation

Journalists (Television-18; Radio-13) – Lack in inventiveness and creativity; they often fail to get across the core and essence of the story; do not have the knack of finding material for their own sources. That's why in most cases they do not come up with ideas for stories of their own and wait for the producer to find a story for them. If given clear-cut assignments, they seldom meet the deadlines set. There are acute reporting problems in the First Channel. Reporters usually forget such basics of journalism as "what, when, where and how", most of them are tied-tongued and sadly lacking in reporting skill. Live interviews turn into repetitive monologues uninterrupted by the interviewer. This pseudo-reporting usually comes live from parliament, state chancellery and other official venues. There is no interaction between the reporter in the field and the studio, since presenters never ask any questions from the reporters. The worst format is live broadcast illustrated by syncs of people, related to the story. Then the reporter is left to lead the audience on his/her own, repeating what has already been said in the sync. On

many occasions, 3 syncs are aired one after another, uninterrupted neither by the reporter nor by the presenter.

Producers and editors (Television-5; Radio-5) – None of the producers, who currently work in the First Channel are qualified to produce news programs.

Regional network – Consists of seven regional TV Crews (was recently reduced from 10 to 7). Regional journalists are actually left to themselves without proper guidance and attention from the head office. They never generate stories by themselves and get involved in news production only in case of something happens in the regions of Georgia or a government delegation visits the regional city. While the regional coverage should account for at least 40% of the total air time, the extended news program rarely involves 2 or 3 brief reports from the regions of Georgia and seldom covers current topical problems. Some of the regional journalists do not have vehicles and cameras of their own and borrow them from their colleagues of other TV Companies.

Moscow Bureau – Only one foreign bureau operates in the Public Broadcaster. But due to financial problems and lack of proper management it is not able to contribute properly to the news programs in general.

Goal of the Strategy

The goal of the strategy is to build up the capacity of the convergence newsroom so as to produce four news issues per day and one prime time extended news program, and non-stop radio news coverage supported with online news edition. All three elements of the Public Broadcasting news service will work within the framework of the unified informational policy, provide the human and technical resources enough to fulfill the social responsibility of the public broadcaster as well as lay the groundwork for further learning, professional skill upgrading and raising media quality standards.

Strategy

Our approach is to work in three main directions:

- ✓ develop effective structure of the convergence newsroom;
- ✓ Build up technical capacities;
- ✓ Raise professionalism of the staff involved in news production;

Developing convergence newsroom – to identify and introduce the most effective structure of the newsroom which first enables to bring within the same management shelter all three elements of the news formats – radio, online and television room. All three news channels should adhear to a common information policy but allow room for difference of the format that provide differences of the news content and coverage. The strategy of developing final structure also includes development of the news format that will be new, competitive and appropriate for the public broadcasting.

Activities:

- ✓ News market research;
- ✓ Focus group research;
- ✓ Elaboration of the concept;
- ✓ Structural changes within the TV – implementation phase;

- ✓ development of the regional network and support to regional studios;
- ✓ Tminority integration promotion.

Building up Technical Capacities

The goal is to develop technical capacities that enable news service to produce hourly news briefs every day and three extended news programs of the television format and radio news every half an hour. This means that the public broadcasting should totally renovate its equipment and switch to digitization of its operations. The goal is to introduce AVID–computerized system for effective news production. Another technical task is to build the system of the signal distribution that will make the Broadcaster's voice heard nationwide.

Activities:

- ✓ Ensuring transmission and high quality of the Public Broadcaster's signal all over the territory of Georgia;
- ✓ Consultancy and evaluation of the current condition and possibilities and challenges in introduction of the news operations system;
- ✓ Identification of potential partners and acquiring the latest in equipment;
- ✓ Start building up a new newsroom and putting a new TV System in place;
- ✓ Define selection criteria, select and train new technical staff involved in news production.

Those problems are connected with unsettled material and financial issues that I have already touched upon above as well as with the relationship that has been established between the Broadcaster and TV center over the past years.

Unfortunately, estimation of the investment cost, work volume and time limits will only be possible after solving these problems and providing detailed description of our assets

Professional Standards

Implementation of high professional standards in news issues, ensuring editorial independence and attracting new staff

Building up human resources, raising professionalism is an issue of crucial importance.

As soon as new format of the TV news programs and radio news is defined it is essential to reserve and train staff responsible for the content of the news programs, meaning journalists, editors and producers. The goal of the Public Broadcasting is to identify and promote new faces and potential of the journalists that lead to news operations basing on the professional standards of media.

Currently we work on the Code of Conduct, which will become compulsory for all staff of the Broadcaster. We have also planned to invite a permanent consultant, who will ensure that the staff follows the standards established by the Code. The practice showed unfortunately that short-term courses are of little practical use.

Selection of HR

- Develop section criteria separately for all levels of the newsroom staff – Hosts, producers and editors, journalists, cameramen, directors etc.
- Selection of human resources – from currently existing human resources as well as attract new faces from outside the TV
- Build up professional capacities

Internship program attracting outside resources

- Producers' courses
- Journalists' courses
- Cameramen's courses
- Outside consultancy
- Development of inside raising and parallel learning capacities inside the newsroom
- Change in the present contractual practice, implementing contract policy, transferring personnel on a long-term contract basis

Ensuring public participation in thematic programming of the broadcasting

Public oriented programming should be based on public interests, which first of all implies permanent communication with public.

The Supervisory Board of the Public Broadcaster shall identify the criteria that will allow us to have a means towards this end. On the basis of these criteria public committees can be established, the opinions of which along with public opinion poll findings will be taken into account when forming a broadcasting network.

Diversified coverage of minority problems and their professional advancement

Care should be taken to rule out unethical invectives, offensive visual images and stereotypes with regard to ethnic/religious and any other minorities and to give them a worthy treatment in our TV and radio programs. In cooperation with the Supervisory Board we should draft a plan for enlisting the minorities' participation in defining the station's policy and for getting them professionally involved in newsroom work.

Intended Time-frame

Transition Period (1 year): PB continues to work within existing format providing basic news flow in minority languages. In order to improve current coverage PSB plans transitional strategy in order to promote further cooperation in targeting national minorities. For the next year period PSB will

- ✓ improve transmission of the TV signal reaching minority regions of Georgia;
- ✓ arrange for translation of the main news program "Mtavari" into minority languages (*First project supported by OSCE is to provide translation of news program into Azeri for minorities living in Kvemo Kartli region, and transmission of the signal in cooperation with one of the local TV stations.*)
- ✓ foster the process of integration of minority programs into the main newsroom in order to have the voices of minorities heard nationwide.

Development Period (3 years): The Public Broadcaster will develop strategy targeting national minorities. News programming becomes the part of the overall program including News, Talk-show and Documentary programs aimed at promoting national integration process. Tasks for the next three years (Our challenge: Strategy depends on State National Integration Program –

promotion of Georgian language among residents of regions, conflict settlement and stepping up economic development rates. Building up technical capacities for signal transmission):

- ✓ Development of PSB regional studio network – Main news broadcast locally by regional studios, translation should be provided locally. Local news inserts following the main news program should be prepared by regional studios involving minorities and focusing on the issues of minority communities; Top news identified by the regional studios covered in national news.
- ✓ Building up technical capacities – In order to provide access for minorities to national news PSB will build technical capacities for signal transmission step-by-step as well as translation into minority languages.
- ✓ Internship programs – Students of regional Universities, as well as reporters working for regional media outlets get internships with national news staff in Tbilisi.

Summary

Finally, I would like to highlight once again that we are fully aware of the conditions in which Public Broadcasting now exists. We realize that the public has great expectations of the channel and we shall try to live up to them. Our team is fully aware of the unique role assigned to Public Broadcasting in building up liberal democracy and an open society. Time does not wait, so no day passes without us contributing towards this objective. This is a great moral responsibility, but neither my colleagues, nor I are seeking easy time-serving solutions which can only result in disseminating inaccurate information and producing tasteless and antisocial TV programs.

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