

ENGLISH only



EMBASSY OF GEORGIA TO THE REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA
PERMANENT MISSION OF GEORGIA TO THE OSCE AND OTHER
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN VIENNA

2010 OSCE Review Conference - Human Dimension Session
Warsaw, 7 October 2010

Statement of the Georgian Delegation
Forward-looking discussions, Session 1: Freedom of media

Mr/Madame Moderator,

Let me reiterate once again that Georgia has constantly supported the role played by the Office of the Representative on Freedom of Media (RFoM) in assisting the participating States to implement their commitments. We appreciate continuous interest of the Representative's Office in reforms and developments taking place in Georgia.

The current status of the media freedom in Georgia is an important achievement and represents the result of both, the active engagement of the civil society in line with the Governmental reforms and the international contribution, including the OSCE and its Representative on Freedom of Media. Progressive trends have been highlighted in the Regular Report (4 March 2010) of the Representative on Freedom of the Media of OSCE to the Permanent Council, where it is clearly stated that "diversity in the television media is advancing in Georgia." In the report of July 2010, Ms. Dunja Mijatovic welcomed the positive steps that Georgia has already undertaken and expressed her hope that the reform process will continue.

The May 2010 local elections once more shed light on the positive trends leading the media development in Georgia. Georgian media allowed the voters to make more informed choice at 2010 local elections and Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) offered a balanced picture of the electoral campaign. The overall media environment and the access of the main contenders/parties to the airwaves were carefully scrutinized by a number of independent research organizations. According to the ODIHR: "During the election campaign, the media broadcast a variety of election-related programmes, including debates, allowing voters to be more informed in order to make their choice. In most cases, reporting of the main channels had neutral tone – a sharp improvement over previous years."

Fostering media freedom and pluralism in the country remains one of the top priorities of the Government of Georgia and Georgian society. Let me briefly emphasize some reforms accomplished by the Government of Georgia with the objective to improve media environment in Georgia:

Following the proposal of President of Georgia, the Parliament of Georgia adopted legal amendments aimed at extending the Board of Public Broadcaster (GPB) in order to reflect adequately the variety of views existing in Georgian society. As a result, a renewed composition of the GPB board has been approved including extra Parliamentary oppositional parties. Simultaneously, mandate and oversight authority of the Board has been strengthened.

GPB financial independence has been strengthened through amendments introduced to the Law on Broadcasting according to which, 0.12 % of GDP was diverted to the Public Broadcaster. The reform which eliminates dependence on budget Law and contributes to the media freedom in the country, was welcomed by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, Miklos Haraszti in January 2010 and assessed as "an affirmation of the principle that television must be exempt from Government influences" (Statement of 19 January, 2010).

Besides, Parliament of Georgia approved a draft law on amendments to the Tax Code, envisaging writing off tax debt of television stations accumulated before March 1, 2010. Tax amnesty of all television stations will relieve them from budgetary debts and secure further development of media.

GPB news editorial policy has significantly changed and now is following BBC guidelines. The European Union Delegation to Georgia and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Georgia are implementing Media Monitoring Development Project in Georgia. One of the components of the project is the capacity building of the Georgian Public Broadcaster by the BBC World Service Trust to reach highly professional media coverage and bring the broadcasting to the European standards.

Establishment of a special political television channel modeled after C-SPAN and/or BBC Parliament followed a joint initiative of the Chairman of the Parliament, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Georgian Public Broadcasting, and the General Director of Georgian Public Broadcasting. The special political television channel, so called Second Channel, has been launched in February 2010. The channel provides live coverage of all

activities of opposition and gives equal opportunity to all political parties and groups in delivering their political views to the public.

Implementation of the accurate, balanced and professional reporting standards has been started; Broadcasters are requested to create or to adhere to a self-regulation mechanism ensuring the compliance with the Broadcasters Code of Conduct adopted in 2009 in the view of guaranteeing accurate, balanced, professional and ethical reporting. GPB has significantly reshaped its editorial policy in compliance with the guidelines developed by BBC experts in frame of a project supported by European Union Delegation to Georgia aimed at straightening Georgian Public Broadcaster.

Georgian National Communication Commission represents an independent regulatory body in the broadcasting field; its independence is guaranteed and acknowledged. Representatives of opposition parties are participating in all activities carried out by the Commission, including decision making on issuing licenses to the broadcasters. Regulatory independence of Georgia was highly assessed by the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) in 2008.

Georgian National Communication Commission (GNCC) has immediately followed the advice of the OSCE High Representative for the Freedom of Media and has undertaken steps to become a member of EPRA – European Platform for European Regulatory Authorities. GNCC will soon benefit from the European experience in Broadcasting regulation. Exchange of the European experience and European level discussion about the best practices and challenges of the broadcasting regulatory bodies will benefit the GNCC in terms of the compliance with the best European standards in broadcasting regulation. It is expected that GNCC will become an observer member of EPRA by the end of this year.

All above-mentioned reforms demonstrate that significant progress has been made in number of important areas: diversity in the television media has notably advanced in Georgia; important steps have been undertaken to promote accurate, professional and fair reporting. Nevertheless, we recognize that shortcomings remain and we need to do more to fully comply with high international standards. The Georgian authorities remain committed to further pursue its efforts to strengthen media freedom and pluralism and to increase transparency with regard to media ownership. We reiterate our determination to further intensive work on tackling all existing problems through active and close cooperation with the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

We are looking forward to hosting the “South Caucasus Media Conference” in November 2010, in Tbilisi, which for the past 6 years has become a good yearly tradition with active participation of the representatives from three States of the region. Conference constitutes a significant deal of contribution in the process of developing free media in the whole region.

Thank you!