



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

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Warsaw, 26 September 2011

Statement of the Georgian Delegation

Session 1: Fundamental Freedoms I, including
Freedom of expression, free media and information

Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to underscore that issues regarding the freedom of the media are high on the agenda of the Georgian authorities and the Georgian public. In this context, numerous reforms were accomplished during the recent years by the Government with the objective to improve media environment in Georgia, facilitate media pluralism and bring the broadcasting to the European standards.

I would like to use this opportunity and briefly update you on the developments and achievements of Georgia in the field of freedom of the media.

As a result of active cooperation of all relevant stakeholders and more than fifty NGO representatives, on 8 April 2011, the Parliament passed amendments to the Law of Georgia on Broadcasting which is aimed at enhancing media ownership and financial transparency. Measures include prohibition for companies registered in offshore locations to own shares in a broadcasting license; broadcasters and the Commission are required to publish proactively on their web-sites ownership related information/eligibility declarations as well as information about revenues from advertising, sponsorship, TV-shopping and donations.

Moreover, amendments introduced by the new Criminal Procedural Code guarantee a higher standard of protection for media institutions during the investigation proceedings.

Georgia has followed and undertaken relevant steps in accordance with the advice of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. As a result, Georgia became a member of European Platform for European Regulatory Authorities on 26 May 2011.

Government of Georgia is committed to further promote freedom of media and secure ability of journalists to cover all events of public interest. In this regard, I am glad to say that with cooperation and assistance of the Media Representative's Office a project on "Press security at Public Protests", which implies a one day training for journalists, will be carried out in Tbilisi in October this year. The objective of this project is increasing the level of education of participating journalists in relevant legal environment, explaining the ethical norms that have to be followed while covering public protests or mass demonstrations, training in the rules of safe behaviour while in the field. Georgia will welcome Media Representative's (RFoM) long term involvement in the project.

Besides, we are looking forward to hosting the “South Caucasus Media Conference” in October 2011, in Tbilisi, which for the past 7 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.

Finally, let me reiterate once again that Georgia strongly supports the role played by the Office of the Representative on Freedom of Media in assisting the participating States to implement their commitments in the field of media freedom.

Thank you.

Facilitating Media Pluralism in Georgia:

In order to ensure transparency of media ownership, amendments to the law on broadcasting were prepared upon the initiative of the Chairman of Parliament. The proposed amendments aim at strengthening the legislative framework for the transparency of media ownership through limiting off-shore ownership in electronic media.

In late 2010 parliament presented initial draft law and through its NGO Liaison Office organized series of wide-range meetings about the draft amendments with representatives of NGO's, broadcaster companies, the Diplomatic Corps, the Georgian National Communications Commission and media schools of Georgian universities. Afterwards the draft law was submitted to the parliament for adoption.

As a result of the meetings and some additional consultations the final draft law included the followings:

- ✓ The companies registered in off-shore zones were totally banned from holding a share directly or indirectly in a broadcasting company.
- ✓ For transparency of ownership information, broadcasters and the Commission shall proactively publish ownership related information/eligibility declarations on their web-sites.
- ✓ Relevant provisions comprising procedures for issuing licenses, suspending, prolongation of validity term, modification and termination of licenses are added to the Law.
- ✓ Status of Adjarian Television shall be regulated by the law. Additional date was set, by November 1, 2011 for proposals on legislative changes.
- ✓ Annual information related to eligibility declarations shall be submitted to the Commission no later than on February 1 of the following year and within 10 days after any changes.
- ✓ Content of the annual reporting forms to be submitted by broadcasters to the Georgian National Communications Commission. While the law in force already provides the requirement for broadcaster to submit information about sources of a broadcaster financing, it is defined that this information shall comprise information about revenues from advertising, sponsorship, TV-shopping and donations provided separately.
- ✓ Amendments implies the license seeker, while submitting the licensing application to the Commission, to provide along with the financing plan, as already required by the law, the information about financing sources.

Amendments to the law on broadcasting were finally adopted by the parliament on April 8, 2011