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*The Georgian National Communication Commission (GNCC), operating without a head for more than one year, finally elected a chair.*



# GEORGIA

Nearly two years after a change in government, and less than a year after presidential elections, 2014 was a year of trials and tribulations for media in Georgia. Members of the media sector began the year full of enthusiasm and expectations, with the belief that the industry could overcome the setbacks experienced in previous years. However, members of the MSI panel stated that the situation in Georgia has neither improved nor deteriorated. These conditions bred a feeling of disenchantment toward the end of 2014, resulting in an overall MSI score that lowered from 2.63 to 2.51, a small decline.

Maestro TV was at the center of media observers' attention, due to an exodus of its journalists. Altogether, 20 journalists officially left the channel between September and December 2014. One significant loss was the firing of Nino Zhizhilashvili (also an MSI panelist), the deputy director in charge of the news service and an anchor of the flagship evening political talk show *Nine*. An additional 19 journalists resigned. In her interview with the MSI moderator, Zhizhilashvili claimed that management told her that the channel's programs must become "ideological" or "pro-Georgian." The case was brought forward to the Media Advocacy Coalition (MAC) to determine if Maestro TV was violating editorial independence or employment rights.

The government initiated several crucial legislative amendments centered on improving the media environment. However, a number of these initiatives did not translate into favorable results. For example, the newly adopted amendments retain the practice of secret surveillance, thereby granting the Ministry of Interior the right to access telecommunication networks. The amendments also have hindered implementation of new regulations for selecting the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) board of trustees. Board selection is still not complete, and some panelists said that they detect political motives.

Panelists remained disappointed with the courts and their inability to effectively deal with lawsuits that involve the media. Conversely, the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics (GCJE) has been inundated with cases from media professionals, public officials, and the general public, proving that GCJE has evolved into an active and respected association tasked with upholding the ethics of the profession.

Despite these setbacks, 2014 saw some positive moments. The Georgian National Communication Commission (GNCC), operating without a head for more than one year, finally elected a chair. A person nominated by the president held this position formerly; it is now filled through an internal election. Moreover, panelists have stated that the quality of journalism and reporting have improved in 2014 compared to 2013 and 2012.

# GEORGIA at a glance

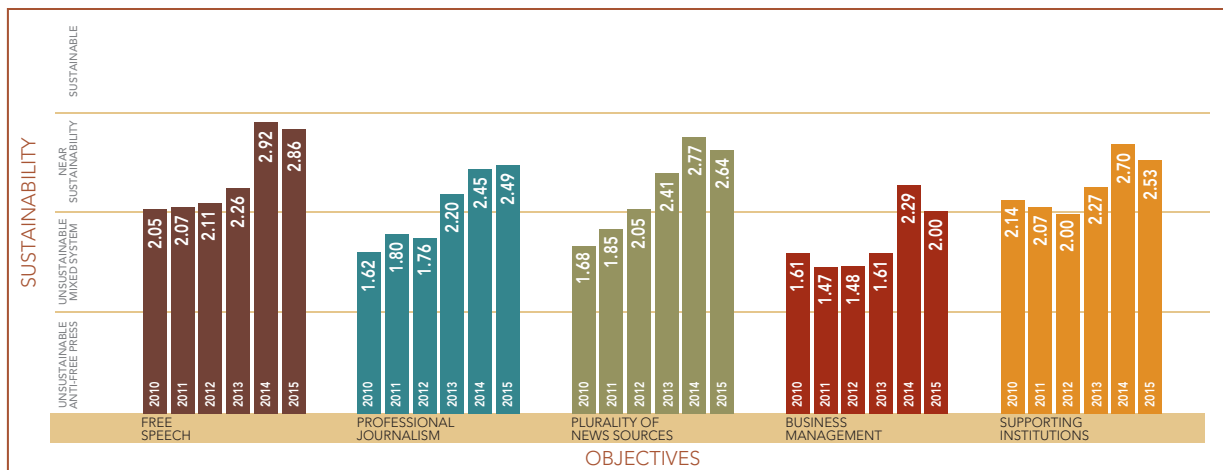
## GENERAL

- > Population: 4,935,880 (July 2014 est. *CIA World Factbook*)
- > Capital city: Tbilisi
- > Ethnic groups (% of population): Georgian 83.8%, Azeri 6.5%, Armenian 5.7%, Russian 1.5%, other 2.5% (2002 census, *CIA World Factbook*)
- > Religion (% of population): Orthodox Christian 83.9%, Muslim 9.9%, Armenian-Gregorian 3.9%, Catholic 0.8%, other 0.8%, none 0.7% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > Languages (% of population): Georgian 71% (official), Russian 9%, Armenian 7%, Azeri 6%, other 7% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > GNI (2013-Atlas): \$15.98 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2014)
- > GNI per capita (2013-PPP): \$ 7,040 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2014)
- > Literacy rate: 99.7% (male 99.8%, female 99.7 %) (2011 est. *CIA World Factbook*)
- > President or top authority: President Giorgi Margvelashvili (since October 27, 2013)

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > Number of print outlets, radio stations, television stations: Print: 311 newspapers (National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2013); Television Stations: 64 (41 terrestrial, 23 satellite) plus 74 cable channels; Radio Stations: 71 (Georgian National Communications Commission, 2014)
- > Newspaper circulation statistics: *Rezonansi* (4,000–5,000 daily), *24 Saati* (4,500 weekly), *Kviris Palitra* (55,000 weekly) (individual newspaper claims)
- > Broadcast ratings: Highest rated television outlets in Tbilisi and six regional cities with population 45 000 and more: Rustavi2, 3.96%; Imedi, 3.11%; Maestro 1.85% (TV MR GE)
- > Annual advertising revenue in the media sector: Television: approximately \$47 million; unknown for print and radio (TV MR GE, 2014)
- > News agencies: info 9, Black Sea Press, Iveroni, NovostiGruzia, Sarke, Interpressnews, Iprinda, ItarTass, Kavkazpress, Media News, Prime Time News, Pirveli, Georgian Business Consulting News, Georgian HotNews, GeoNews, Expressnews, World Sport, ambebi.ge, Business Press News, Droni.ge, epn.ge, Saqinform, Aianews.ge, Kakheti Information Center, Primetimenews.ge, Kvemo Kartli Information Center, Mtkheta-Tianeti Information Center, for.ge, Frontnews, civil.ge ([www.yellowpages.ge](http://www.yellowpages.ge)).
- > Internet subscribers: 577,439 (Georgian National Communications Commission, 2014)

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: GEORGIA



## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2015: OVERALL AVERAGE SCORES



### CHANGE SINCE 2014

▲ (increase greater than .10) □ (little or no change) ▼ (decrease greater than .10)

**Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0–1):** Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

**Unsustainable Mixed System (1–2):** Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

**Near Sustainability (2–3):** Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

**Sustainable (3–4):** Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

Scores for all years may be found online at [http://www.irex.org/system/files/EE\\_msiscorers.xls](http://www.irex.org/system/files/EE_msiscorers.xls)

## OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Georgia Objective Score: 2.86

The overall score for this objective remained almost identical to last year's score. The panelists maintained that the legal environment for media in Georgia remains liberal and the government is enthusiastic about taking steps to improve the country's legal framework. However, the panelists also noted that the government can be unpredictable in its decisions and has introduced a stream of legal amendments. The amendments raise questions over the "uncertainty" of government actions, according to Nino Jangirashvili, the director of the small, privately owned, Kavkasia TV station. She said of the regulatory atmosphere, "Changes were far too intense, taking place almost every month."

The panelists that represented broadcasters worried that despite the tendency of the government to involve media representatives in the policy-making process, the hectic nature of legislative work in 2014 did not enhance operating environment of media. Natia Kuprashvili, director of the Georgian Association of Regional Broadcasters (GARB), wondered "how can [the government] be so inconsistent?" In 2014 alone, five separate changes to media legislation were put forward.

### LEGAL AND SOCIAL NORMS PROTECT AND PROMOTE FREE SPEECH AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION.

#### FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

- > Legal and social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.
- > Licensing or registration of media protects a public interest and is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against media professionals, citizen reporters, and media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > The law protects the editorial independence of state of public media.
- > Libel is a civil law issue; public officials are held to higher standards, and offended parties must prove falsity and malice.
- > Public information is easily available; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media, journalists, and citizens.
- > Media outlets' access to and use of local and international news and news sources is not restricted by law.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

In February 2014, lawmakers introduced amendments to the Georgian election code and the law on broadcasting's political advertising regulations. The amendments changed the way that broadcasters must report on advertising deals. Jangirashvili said that the trickiest part of this amendment was that it was out into force only 52 days before the elections, so "we all missed the reporting deadlines," she said. "The problem was incongruence between different articles in amended laws." One law required the broadcasters to report to GNCC, and another required reporting to the Central Electoral Commission (CEC). This confusion resulted in GNCC filing lawsuits against 15 broadcasters. In 14 of the cases, the court settled the issues without fining the media outlets, while one of the regional broadcasters was fined GEL 1500 (\$675), Kuprashvili said.

On October 31, the Parliament of Georgia passed a bill on the regulation of social advertising (public service announcements). According to the changes, private broadcasters are obligated to air social advertisements free of charge for 90 seconds every three hours. The panelists noted that the amendments essentially granted excessive control to GNCC, and they found the definition of social advertising vague. A coalition of broadcast media members, supported by non-governmental organizations and rights groups, appealed to the Georgian president and members of the legislative and executive branches to temporarily suspend the discussion of the draft law, prior to its adoption. In a statement released by the group, they argued, "Granting an additional function to the Commission would limit the editorial independence of the broadcasters," and therefore run the "risk of using social advertising for political motives during the pre-election period." But Kuprashvili and Jangirashvili said that the views of the broadcasters were not taken into consideration.

Wiretapping conducted by law-enforcement bodies remains a lingering issue in Georgia, despite amendments adopted in November 2014. The Beselia-Popkhadze-Sesiashvili set of amendments has weakened the legislation on protection of human rights, and civil society and rights groups regard the amendments as a step back. The parliament overturned a veto issued by the president and ignored his counter-proposals. Civil society groups criticized this law widely, as it allows security agencies to retain direct access to telecom operator networks, potentially posing a serious threat to citizens' privacy.

The panelists also noted the gravity of the law's implications. "What we ended up with is that surveillance became legal," *Netgazeti* editor Nestan Tsetskhladze asserted. "And most importantly, it is about monitoring the Internet as well. It affects everybody, every journalist. This issue is vitally important. When we speak about the security of the



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journalists, for example, when I talk to my journalists, this law cannot guarantee that the government is not controlling my phone and Internet communication.”

Earlier in May, Rustavi 2 aired conversations allegedly taped by the Ministry of Interior in 2013 to show the extent to which the Ministry was snooping. The airing of the secret recording of a conversation between government representatives, opposition members, and business owners prompted Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili to lambast the channel. The Prosecutor’s Office launched an investigation in whether sections of the criminal code covering the use of private communications had been violated by Rustavi 2. The Georgian Young Lawyer’s Association provided support to Rustavi 2, arguing that the channel and its administration acted in accordance with the existing law.

Political control of media outlets and their content still plague the sector. At the end of the year, privately owned Maestro TV was shaken by the departure of 20 journalists. Nineteen journalists resigned, and MSI panelist Nino Zhizhilashvili, who served as a deputy director in charge of news programs and the anchor of Maestro’s central analytical daily talk show, was fired a few days after the MSI panel was conducted. She said she was planning to quit her job in the beginning of 2015 because she learned that the state chancellery’s chief communications consultant, Koka Kandiasvili, would host *Tbilisi Speaking*, a new evening program to replace her talk show. “I was also told that the channel’s main analytical talk show has to be more ideological, pro-Georgian,” Zhizhilashvili recalled. “Pro-Georgian means that it shouldn’t be pro-Western,” she added. The 20 journalists are bringing their case forward to MAC to determine if Maestro TV violated editorial independence or employment rights.

This is not the only time Maestro TV has been embroiled in scandal. In May 2014, days after Maestro journalist and anchor Vakho Sanaia aired reports criticizing the government, the government released an official statement reproaching Sanaia for being biased.

In 2014, GNCC granted a long-sought license to the Ninotsminda community radio NORI. Licensing will no longer be required for terrestrial television broadcasters after the digital switchover in 2015. Content producers will be able to start terrestrial television broadcasters after a simplified authorization process, and then can pay a multiplex operator to be included in a free package or in a pay-to-view package.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Introducing digital terrestrial TV in Georgia—everything you need to know about government’s switchover strategy, retrieved from <http://transparency.ge/en/node/4093>

In February, the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development presented the government’s strategy for the digital switchover. The strategy is headed by the Digital Broadcasting Agency, a newly established entity under the Ministry. In June, broadcasting company Stereo + was named the winner of a contest to construct the infrastructure and ensure nationwide dissemination of the broadcasting signal by June 2015.

Most panelists noted that journalist mistreatment was not as common in 2014 as in past years. But when attacks do occur, often such cases proceed with impunity. “In previous years, sometimes they would end up with life-threatening injury,” said Ekaterine Tsimakuridze, a coordinator for the Georgian Media Legal Defense Center at the Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association (GYLA). “Now, there are single cases of ill treatment of journalists, mostly in the form of verbal abuse.”

In June, TV 25, a small channel in Adjara aired an investigative report on the activities of the Deputy of the Supreme Council of Adjara. Soon after the release of the film, Jaba Ananidze, the film producer and a journalist with TV 25, claimed that the president of the Commission of Human Rights of the Supreme Council, Medea Vasadze, contacted him on his personal mobile phone. TV 25 circulated clips of the recording of the conversation, in which Vasadze appears to threaten Ananidze and refer to his sexual orientation. After analyzing the recording, the Chief Prosecutor’s Office of Georgia stated that it did not detect violations.<sup>2</sup>

Nino Narimanishvili, editor of the small regional newspaper *Samkhretis Karibche* in the city of Akhaltsikhe, noted that her journalists have witnessed the pressure of law enforcement bodies and the public. This came along after they published a series of articles on police and community mistreatment of the relatives of a murder suspect. Narimanishvili noted that representatives of the local ministry of interior called the publication several times, asking for changes to the narrative. “The fact that there is impunity is not the only matter of concern; the most alarming issue is that the cases are not even investigated,” added Gela Mtvilishvili, director of Kakheti Information Center.

Mtvilishvili recalled the experience he had while videotaping a Georgian Dream Party meeting at one of the election districts in Pankisi Gorge in June 2014. Participants suspended the session and forcefully ejected Mtvilishvili from the venue. Afterwards, his camera was seized and an attempt was made to erase the recording. “I appealed to relevant bodies, but it didn’t yield any results,” Mtvilishvili concluded.

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<sup>2</sup> Ombudsman requests Adjara Supreme Council to study legality of actions by MP Medea Vasadze, retrieved from <http://www.media.ge/en/portal/news/302855/>

Georgian media members have long mistrusted police investigations and the court system. Panelists said that courts sometimes deliberately slow down the discussion of media cases or just categorize the cases under a different article in the law, to avoid mention of tampering with journalists' work. Tsimakuridze said that in 2013, GYLA filed several cases regarding journalist attacks, but none were investigated. Ia Mamaladze, publisher of *Guria News*, said that investigators contacted her in August to inquire about the cases from 2011 and 2012, but they never followed through.

Georgian law enforcement does not take citizen reporters seriously. Panelists said that authorities seem not to view citizen reporters as credible media professionals. Mtvlishvili noted that it is common practice for law enforcement bodies to interfere with citizen reporters that work without a professional camera or with equipment not bearing a logo from a media outlet.

Mamuka Andguladze, a senior analyst from Transparency International (TI), recalled incidents from September 2014 in which law enforcement officers halted citizens recording police raids. In a TI report released in September 2014, the organization expressed its concern, noting, "Restrictions are applied without any explanation and include prohibition of recording, erasing of recorded material, and in some cases even detention of citizens."<sup>3</sup>

The 2013 amendments to the Law on Broadcasting, largely acclaimed by media and civil society groups, saw major challenges in execution in 2014. After several attempts to elect the board of trustees according to the rules specified in the law, the two-seat quota for minority representatives remains unfilled. While parliamentarians were struggling to strike a deal, the Georgian constitutional court ruled unconstitutional the parliament's decision on pre-term abolishment of the authority of the old GPB board of seven members. Following this decision, parliament was compelled to pass a legislative amendment to keep the members of the old board in place as a separate body with an advisory function but no decision-making authority. Nino Danelia, a journalism professor at Ilia State University and a member of the old GPB board, said, "Now we have two councils—the one that is a decision-maker, and the other that is monitoring the first one." Kuprashvili said that the balance is artificially created, and suspects that the parliamentary majority is passive in electing the remaining two minority representatives because the previous parliament elected the old board.

<sup>3</sup> The government must not restrict citizen journalism, retrieved from <http://transparency.ge/en/post/general-announcement/government-must-not-restrict-citizen-journalism>

In Georgia, libel is an issue of civil law. To the panelists' knowledge, no cases related to libel occurred in 2014. However, Kuprashvili recalled one instance in which investigative journalists in Adjara violated the norms of the ethics charter by circulating untruthful information. The government of Adjara did not take the case to court, and instead appealed to GCJE.

Media representatives continue to fight to gain access to public information, often through the courts. Many governmental bodies employ the tactic of slow processing of public information requests. The panelists had a number of complaints regarding access to public information, naming procedural and bureaucratic practices as a major obstacle. They observed that the situation has worsened somewhat compared with 2013. As part of the project [www.opendata.ge](http://www.opendata.ge), a report monitoring access to public information, the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information sent 493 public information requests to 29 public institutions between October 1, 2013, and March 1, 2014. They reported that 269 (55 percent) of requests for information were answered. The remaining requests either went unanswered, were incomplete, or were met by public officials refusing to provide information.

An online portal, [mygov.ge](http://mygov.ge), operated by the Ministry of Justice for fielding public information requests, is a useful tool for managing and monitoring the process, some panelists noted. In 2011, Georgia joined the Open Government Partnership, an international platform to ensure increasing government transparency and responsiveness to citizen needs. In 2014, the government drafted the Open Data action plan for 2014-15, in which it commits to improving various tools designed to ensure transparency and openness.<sup>4</sup>

Access to public officials is hindered by the competency of public relations departments, some panel members said. "When calling the public relations officers, they do not give you an answer," Zaal Udumashvili said. "Neither do they ease the access to relevant officials responsible for an issue." Tsimakuridze pointed to the general tendency of some bodies to withhold information, which, for media, commonly becomes cause for a court appeal. Most panel members agreed that the Ministry of the Interior and the Prosecutor's Office are particularly notorious for withholding information.

After the 2013 changes in the Law on Courts of General Jurisdiction, GPB was authorized to record audio and video materials of judicial proceedings and also made responsible for the circulation of those materials among relevant parties. The law does not specify how much GPB has to record, and

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.opengovpartnership.org/sites/default/files/OGP%20AP%20GEORGIA.pdf>

usually the journalists of GPB chronicle only those moments that are interesting to them, Mtivlishvili and Udumashvili complained. Maia Tabagari, the head of Imedi News Service, added that circulation of those materials could be accomplished more quickly; often by the time other media receive it, it is out of date.

The panelists noted that access to and use of international and local news is not an issue. The government now imposes no restrictions or regulations, unlike in previous years. Due to tense political relations with Russia, the previous Georgian government had pulled most Russian channels off the air. However, the current government, the Georgian Dream Party, brought back the channels.

The government places no barriers on choosing journalism as a profession. Guria News publisher Mamaladze noted that the government only partially funds journalism students, so this could make a prospective student think twice before choosing to study journalism.

Bloggers and freelancers have difficulty securing accreditation to attend press briefings. Generally, media outlets receive a formal invitation to conferences, together with a request to send out an official list of attendees, signed by an editor. Panel members noted that bloggers and freelancers often are not included on these lists, which precludes them from attending press briefings.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Georgia Objective Score: 2.49

The score for Objective 2 has remained stable for the past two years, reflecting an improvement in the professional standards in the media sector compared with the past. Some panelists noted that the progress is due to the rising competition among media outlets.

The European Commission and UNDP project Mediamonitor, which studies the pre-election media environment, reported considerable improvement in Georgian media coverage in the run-up to the local elections in 2014.<sup>5</sup> But panelists pointed out that there should be more research to monitor media coverage beyond the election period, to provide a clearer picture of how the media perform.

Broadcast media, according to the panelists, are the best in the media sphere for maintaining journalism standards. Conversely, print and online media fail to maintain standards, Jangirashvili said, with the exception of a few publications such as Netgazeti.ge, *Tabula*, *Liberali*,

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.mediamonitor.ge/en>

*Batumelebi*, and *Tskheli Shokoladi*. The Broadcaster's Code of Conduct compels broadcasters to follow specific guidelines, and according to some panelists, the code is the reason for the higher standards. But some panel members noted that the values of individual journalists should be considered when speaking of ethical wrongdoings.

The panelists were quick to add that broadcasters continue to present a spectrum of news quality, from professional to rumor-based narratives, and journalists still tend to produce stories that do not distinguish between fact and opinion. Bias, hate speech, plagiarism, and a lack of balance are common across all types of media, some panel members asserted. Zhizhilashvili noted that "even though the media is less polarized now, compared with the previous years," national broadcasters very commonly report with bias.

Panelists said that the practice of self-censorship declined in 2014, compared with previous years. *Samkhetis Karibche* editor Narimanishvili gave the example of the media coverage of a contentious case between Christians and Muslims over a historic building in Mokhi. She said that the Mokhi case received full coverage, unlike a similar case in Chela in 2013, which saw coverage that sidelined the voices of the Muslim community.

Jangirashvili added that in 2014, the media covered various contentious issues related to the Georgian patriarchy with minimal self-censorship, which proves to be a step forward. However, Zhizhilashvili also recalled issues surrounding the coverage of government expenditures. She said that although the topic spurred significant public interest, one leading television station (which she declined to name) did not report on the issue.

## JOURNALISM MEETS PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF QUALITY.

### PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

- > Reporting is fair, objective, and well-sourced.
- > Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- > Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- > Journalists cover key events and issues.
- > Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption and retain qualified personnel within the media profession.
- > Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- > Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exist (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

In 2014, GCJE addressed many cases of hate speech and discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, gender, and religion. Politicians, journalists, public figures, media outlets and ordinary citizens, lodged an unprecedented number of appeals (60), the panelists noted. For example, Akaki Gogichaishvili, a seasoned journalist and anchor of *Rustavi 2 Business Courier*, organized a “quiz” for his guest, a newly appointed head of national tourism administration. Gogichaishvili pressed him to answer the multiple-choice questions that appeared on the screen, on the condition that he could speak afterwards. After seeing that the respondent was not intending to surrender to his request, Gogichashvili abruptly cut him off the air. The episode spurred criticism from media professionals, and GCJE released a statement<sup>6</sup> saying that Gogichashvili treated the guest unfairly by not notifying him in advance about the program format.

Another 2014 GCJE case was regarding Maestro’s afternoon show, *Otkhi Elementi (Four Elements)*, anchored by four men and featuring a blend of popular culture including sports, lifestyle, gossip, and entertainment along with discussions of human rights, education, literature, and politics. The hosts caused a public outcry after a show on the issue of domestic violence. They appeared to excuse violence by saying that beating a woman is acceptable given certain circumstances. GCJE responded to the case by stating, “The anchors showed inadequate dispositions towards the topic of violence and promoted gender discrimination.”<sup>7</sup> This case was especially sensitive for Georgian society in 2014, due to an unprecedented number of homicides and crimes committed against women by their spouses or ex-partners that year. Many media outlets discussed this issue, with a number of talk shows on a variety of channels dedicating a notable amount of airtime to the dialogue. Nevertheless, Tsatskhelidze had the opinion that the media never really asked critical questions to get to the core of the problem.

According to some panelists, key events are covered well in the Georgian media. But Mamaladze said that the “essence” of the news story is always what matters, and Abramia expressed concern because the topics in which large business groups and politicians show little interest fail to garner significant media attention.

There is a discrepancy in the remuneration of journalists across the media sector, as well as between the capital and the regions. Panelists concluded that journalists are therefore compelled to seek alternative jobs that pay higher salaries. After the shift in power with the Rose Revolution in 2003, many journalists sought jobs with the government.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.liberali.ge/ge/liberali/news/121965/>

<sup>7</sup> A group of citizens against *Otkhi Elementi*, retrieved from <http://qartia.org.ge/?p=2517>

Panelists said that they do not believe that corruption is commonplace among journalists, yet noted the bizarre instance of a former Kavkasia presenter that transitioned into politics. He gained a seat with the Tbilisi Center Assembly, then took a job hosting Maestro TV’s analytical talk show *Subjective Opinion* without relinquishing his assembly seat. Abramia commented, “I personally don’t see a problem with leaving a job and then taking it back...[but] the problem is being in one place and serving the other.”

The panelists’ views diverged on whether, and the degree to which, entertainment programming supersedes hard news. However, in general Georgians interested in finding news content can do so without difficulty.

Facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern in wealthier national broadcasters stationed in the capital. Equipment and facilities at regional outlets are often outdated. Panelists noted that eventually, regional outlets will need to invest a significant portion of their earnings in equipment and facilities, rather than on news production, to help improve the quality of their products.

Niche journalism is almost non-existent in Georgian media. Panelists noted that it would not be profitable for media outlets to hire various journalists for the luxury of niche reporting, and that most media outlets have to refrain from niche reporting due to tight financial resources. Jangirashvili underscored the absence of public demand as another reason why neither journalists nor media outlets pursue particular topics. But not all the panelists shared this view. Abramia asserted, “If [niche topics are] reported well, there will be viewers, hence market demand.” She cited poor professionalism as the chief reason such topics are underserved by the media.

Investigative reporting is mostly absent from Georgian broadcast media, and they are unwilling to promote this type of programming, seeing a lack of public interest. Although GPB is obligated by law to air investigative stories, it only started broadcasting its show *Investigative Reporter* in October 2014. Danelia, who is a member of the monitoring board at GPB, said that the program often violates journalistic standards.

Panelists noted that Studio Monitor ([monitori.ge](http://monitori.ge)), a small investigative media company, is the only Georgian group that produces a good deal of short, in-depth investigative content. Maestro TV airs the programs usually once a month. Studio Monitor’s most recent production probed into the case of a disabled female employee fired from the Georgian postal service. The film underscored the issues of employee rights and the rights of persons with disabilities.



### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Georgia Objective Score: 2.64

Georgia has a multitude of news outlets that provide diverse perspectives, ensuring a plurality of news sources. Yet the overall MSI score for this objective has decreased slightly, from 2.77 to 2.64. Panelists attributed the change to a number of issues within the media landscape, including reports that news agencies receive funding from different public institutions; GPB failing to fill its board of trustees; and the closure of an Armenian language publication.

Television newscasts are the most common way for the general public to receive news. This preference is due to various social, political, technical, and economic obstacles for the development of an Internet infrastructure, along with weak management of newspaper distribution. According to the latest research carried out by CRRG for U.S.-based National Democratic Institute (NDI), 84 percent of Georgians depend on television as a main source of news; 8 percent of interviewees said they get news mainly from Internet; and 1 percent use newspapers as the main source of information.<sup>8</sup> Facebook serves as an important platform for news acquisition and distribution. More than

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.ndi.org/files/NDI\\_Georgia\\_August-2014-survey\\_Public-Issues\\_ENG\\_vf.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/files/NDI_Georgia_August-2014-survey_Public-Issues_ENG_vf.pdf)

#### MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE, OBJECTIVE NEWS.

##### PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > Plurality of public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet, mobile) exist and offer multiple viewpoints.
- > Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted by law, economics, or other means.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for media outlets.
- > Private media produce their own news.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge the objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- > A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources
- > The media provide news coverage and information about local, national, and international issues.

half of its members reported that they use Facebook to read newsfeeds, and 26 percent said they use Facebook to post and share information.<sup>9</sup>

Use of social media as a source for information is common. Facebook dominates the intersection of news and social media, followed by YouTube. Web-based news services, such as Civil.ge, Radio Free Europe, and the online news outlet Netgazeti.ge are largely popular. Twitter is gaining a foothold in the country, mostly among a small group of professional media practitioners. According to official Facebook data in 2014, Georgia has 1.6 million Facebook users.

Only a handful of bloggers create quality content and influence public opinion in Georgia. The number of officially registered blogs is an estimated 3,000, which panelists said is low for a country of roughly 4.8 million people.

In the broadcast television study carried out by NDI in 12 major Georgian cities, 86 percent of interviewees said that they watch Imedi TV to receive information, while 84 percent<sup>10</sup> watch Rustavi 2. About 66 percent watch Maestro TV, and 55 percent follow GPB for daily news.

While the shifting political landscape over the past two years has eased pressure on media outlets, problems with accessibility persist due to poor economic conditions, which are felt most strongly in the regions. Fiber-optic Internet is not available widely to people outside the capital, and Internet penetration remains low, as less than half of the country remains offline. Andguladze recounted that Silknet, one of the main Internet providers, attempted to set up its network in Georgia's western Kharagauli region. Despite their efforts and the desire of communities to subscribe, installing a network was not financially viable.

Narimanishvili noted that her office is paying GEL 180 (\$100) monthly to Delta Net for network service, which is too costly for a smaller publisher. According to GNCC's<sup>11</sup> most recent data, the number of registered mobile network subscribers was 4.65 million in 2014 (excluding multiple subscriptions), while the number of mobile Internet users was 1.5 million. Registered Internet users have been increasing steadily, reaching 577,439 in 2014 compared with 490,413 in 2013.

Since the 2014 elections, GPB has improved its news reporting considerably, according to various independent organizations and NGOs such as [mediamonitor.ge](http://mediamonitor.ge). Panelists noted that GPB has changed from previous years and is

<sup>9</sup> Georgians in the Internet Age: The Profile. Retrieved from <http://www.css.ethz.ch/publications/pdfs/CAD-61-62-2-5.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Imedi TV is the most trusted among the readership, retrieved from <http://www.media.ge/ge/portal/news/302631/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://analytics.gncc.ge/en/statistics-share/?total=total&c=mobiles&sid=64044>

reporting on all stories, but Danelia pointed out, “Still, the interests of the ruling party are explicit in investigative reports aired by GPB.” Kuprashvili concluded that 2014 content analysis data on GPB show better results than 2013, and 2013 was much better than 2012, but the broadcaster still needs to progress.

The Georgian law on broadcasting sets GPB’s requirements and standards for creating programs aimed at different audiences. The board of trustees and a group of many other stakeholders oversee the programming of the public broadcaster. But an enduring crisis regarding the selection of the GPB board had the panelists questioning the efficiency of the board’s actions, and the level of influence it might have on programming. Kuprashvili said that because the GPB board is incomplete (lacking two members), and there is no proper political or technical skill balance, “it is obvious that the board is not able to deal with its responsibilities.” Most panel members agreed that the GPB fails to fill the programming gap left by private television.

The Electoral Code of Georgia obliges broadcasters to air pre-election debates in a non-discriminatory manner, involving all qualified candidates. The code is applied differently from station to station. In the run-up to 2014 municipality elections, GPB satisfied legal requirements and held debates among mayoral candidates of Tbilisi on June 9, where only “qualified” candidates were invited to talk. Unlike GPB, Rustavi 2 aired debates on June 10, which included so-called “qualified” candidates along with “non-qualified” candidates. As elections neared, observers noted that national broadcasters devoted more time to Tbilisi mayoral candidates, almost leaving out the candidates in other Georgian cities.<sup>12</sup>

A number of news agencies provide content to the Georgian media. The agencies offer audio, video, print, and online materials. The content is used either as a background source or is published directly. Nevertheless, a tradition of plagiarism, distortion of facts, replication of materials aired by the broadcasters, and lack of accountability and regulation undermine their credibility. “News agencies remain a black hole in Georgian journalism,” Abramia said. “Agencies, along with online media, have created a certain anonymity, which means that they do not feel accountable towards anything and anyone.” Dimitri Avalini, a journalist at *Tabula* magazine, agreed that it is difficult to fully trust agency materials. “They make mistakes and sometimes even intentionally distort the facts,” he said.

<sup>12</sup> Media Ahead of the 2014 Municipal Elections retrieved from [transparency.ge/sites/default/files/post\\_attachments/Media%20ahead%20of%20the%202014%20Municipal%20Elections\\_0.pdf](http://transparency.ge/sites/default/files/post_attachments/Media%20ahead%20of%20the%202014%20Municipal%20Elections_0.pdf)

Some panelists that are also practicing journalists said that the visibility and credibility of some of the newly established agencies have yet to be determined. It appears to be common for Georgian news agencies to receive funding from the state budget. A report<sup>13</sup> published by Media Development Foundation in September 2014 sought to determine whether state funding is actually trickling into the pockets of the owners of Georgian news agencies. The report stated that “the majority of these ministries (13 out of 18) and the State Chancellery pay the news agencies for such services, which include the coverage of activities in accordance with the requirements of these state entities and the release of information supplied by them, which is an infringement of editorial independence of media outlets.”<sup>14</sup>

Mtivlishvili observed that regional news agencies perform better in producing original content than agencies operating in the capital. In 2014, Mtvlishvili’s Kakheti Information Center won a European Union prize for being the “most informative news agency.” Panelists also concluded that television stations are in better positions to provide original content, as they are required to comply with certain regulations. International news agencies Associated Press, Reuters, and Agence France-Presse continue to provide quality material that Georgian media entities use widely to cover world news.

The ambiguities surrounding the ownership of national broadcasters no longer exist, after the 2011 amendments to the Law on Broadcasting. The new law mandates that broadcasters disclose information on ownership, ensuring greater transparency. According to Andguladze, Georgia’s legislation on media ownership and transparency “is one of the leading in the world,” but Tsetskhladze added that execution of the law is poor.

Panelists noted that even though the owner of Rustavi 2 has been made public, they were not sure if the person named is the actual owner of the company. A report<sup>15</sup> released by TI earlier in 2014 looked into the ownership of Georgia’s 20 national media outlets, analyzing the background of shareholders and their business activities. The analysis concluded that ownership is “now largely transparent... [but] the owners of several media outlets have or had some links with either the ruling Georgian Dream coalition or the current opposition United National Movement.” *Tabula*

<sup>13</sup> Media Receiving Funding from the State Budget Unequal Competition among News Agencies (online media), retrieved from <http://www.mdfgeorgia.ge/uploads//Research/Online%20media,%20State%20Funding,%202013-2014.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> IBID.

<sup>15</sup> Who owns Georgia’s media: Power networks and corporate relationships behind Georgian media outlets, retrieved from <http://transparency.ge/en/node/4126>

*Magazine* was the only company identified in the report as having owners registered in offshore zones.

Another TI Georgia report,<sup>16</sup> released in June 2014 and analyzing the ownership, operations, and financing of local media outlets, concluded that ownership of Georgian regional media outlets is transparent. This report identified no cases in which media owners had links with offshore entities.

The media sector has made definitively positive moves to empower Georgian minorities through a variety of programming. For example, GPB offers minority-language newscasts, and GNCC granted a broadcasting license to radio NOR, an Armenian-language outlet. Local businesses show almost zero interest in investing in minority-language media, several panelists admitted. According to Mikashvidze, “[International] donors like sustainable projects. It is difficult to imagine a sustainable project in Akhalkalaki.” The small audience in predominantly Armenian regions fails to attract advertisers.

One media setback in 2014 occurred with Samkhretis Karibche, a publisher of Georgian and Armenian language newspapers in the Armenian-populated city of Akhaltsikhe. According to Narimanishvili, it was forced to halt production of the Armenian issue due to a lack of funding and human resources capable of handling Georgian-language content. “We had to translate the content from Georgian into Russian, and from Russian into Armenian, and vice versa,” Narimanishvili explained, which caused both “financial and time constraints.” Later, staff at Samkhretis Karibche started a Russian language website, [jnews.ge](http://jnews.ge).

However, Kuprashvili noted that the regional media market in the Azeri-populated Marneuli region is more attractive to advertisers. “There is more money in the region,” she said, and media outlets can sell their “local language content quite well.”

The panelists were split on the subject of local and regional events coverage. Some argued that certainly more regional stories should be aired by all media outlets, including national, local, and regional. Yet other panelists said that only local or regional outlets only should air such programs. “The national broadcasters cannot cover issues of ethnic minorities on a frequent basis...because what is happening in a certain region cannot be a main story [for the whole nation],” Udumashvili explained. Most panelists agreed that ultimately, regional media have the responsibility to provide detailed coverage of regional news. In reality, national media outlets cover mostly national news, and regional media focus generally on local issues. Original reporting about international events is rare, even in neighboring countries.

<sup>16</sup> Who owns Regional media, retrieved from <http://transparency.ge/en/node/4459>

## OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Georgia Objective Score: 2.00

The environment for operating a media business is changing steadily, bringing new challenges to the market players. The regulations enforced in recent years have restricted political money flow into media outlets—a common practice just two or three years ago. The changes have been limiting media outlets’ revenue sources to advertising money almost exclusively. Media owner money exists in the market, but its influence on the industry can be considered minor compared with previous years.

Also as a result of the changes, the MSI business management objective score declined from 2.29 to 2.00 in 2014.

While many media in Tbilisi have made significant advances in better management practices, this is not the case at much of the regional media. “Most of us have no staff assigned to deal with marketing or human resources tasks. We are very far away from hiring staff like that,” says Nino Narimanashvili, pointing to the lack of financial resources as the reason. This is coupled with the lack of demand on the market side: regional businesses are not developed and do not see the value in advertising and marketing. Big businesses tend to use national broadcasters, with little desire to diversify their strategies to include less populated areas. “[Media] companies lack knowledge on how to attract advertising money,” says Maia Mikashvidze, who further commented that technical assistance should be provided to regional media to help them utilize the full potential of the market.

### MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED ENTERPRISES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.

#### BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets operate as efficient and self-sustaining enterprises.
- > Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources.
- > Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market.
- > Advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted standards.
- > Government subsidies and advertising are distributed fairly, governed by law, and neither subvert editorial independence nor distort the market.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor the product to the needs and interests of the audience.
- > Broadcast ratings, circulation figures, and Internet statistics are reliably and independently produced.

TV MR GE, a licensee of Nielsen Television Audience Measurement, surveyed the country's advertising market in 2014. Excluding political and state-ordered advertising, the market totaled \$47 to \$48 million. In the beginning of 2014, a TV MR Georgia representative assessed the Georgian media market as very small, especially lacking the presence of international brands, and suffering from a disorganized sales system.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, panelists attributed a stagnant market to an "inactive business sector," passive advertising agencies, and ignorance among managers of media companies.

According to Andguladze, 80 percent of advertising money in 2014 went to two national broadcasters, Rustavi 2 and Imedi TV. Kuprashvili asked, "How can the market be regarded as sustainable if all except two players must make due with only about 20 percent of the advertising spend?"

Some panelists argued that the practice of allocating state advertising money to national broadcasters without tenders has changed. The previous practice led to unfair distribution of advertising revenue, but recent changes in this practice are allowing for government funding to be distributed through open tenders.

Georgian media have seen greater transparency of information on ownership and revenue due to amendments to the Law on Broadcast Media, carried out after the 2012 parliamentary elections. As a result, broadcasters now operate in an environment that is not dominated by political patronage, but national, local, and regional broadcasters must rely heavily on commercial revenues. This structure creates a more vulnerable environment surrounding commercial income.

Among the number of initiatives in 2014 to amend the laws regulating media were new advertising regulations. These regulations have been controversial, as they would limit commercial breaks to 15 minutes per hour. The law also envisages placing limits on sponsorship, product placement, and hidden advertising practices. GNCC has justified the regulations as steps toward adjusting local regulations to mirror European standards, most of which also restrict ads to 15 minutes per hour.<sup>18</sup>

The panelists agreed that the law might force broadcasters, especially national outlets, to increase advertising rates. Industry predictions were estimating a 40 to 50 percent rise in ad prices.<sup>19</sup> The panelists said that they believe that new regulations might alter the way advertising money is disseminated among industry players. While national

broadcasters are anticipating a decline in the number of ad spots and perhaps in revenues, local media are counting on a probable increase. All panelists agreed that the law should include setting a reasonable time for broadcasters to prepare for implementing the new rules.

In March, the audit department of the state revenue service demanded access to a survey of households, as a way to inspect the company resources of TV MR GE, the licensed representative of Nielsen Television Audience Measurement. The survey data contain sensitive information, including the addresses of families that have participated in the research panel. The revenue service eventually fined TV MR GE, in a move seen by many broadcasters as an attempt to exert influence and gain access to television ratings. "If ratings are controlled, the entire media [sphere] will be controlled," said Maestro TV CEO Iliia Kikabidze.<sup>20</sup> Although legal representatives of the revenue service pointed to the law granting them the right to check resources, the incident had political undertones, according to many observers.

Most of the panelists admitted that broadcasters taking an opposite or even milder position regarding this issue would have immediately been accused of adopting a pro-government stance. Therefore, many in the industry, including those who generally have been critical of TV MR GE's services, supported the company in its fight with the revenue service. Due to the political nature of this incident, many broadcasters abandoned ideas of creating an industry committee to invite a new international survey company to the market. "The fear of being labeled as pro-Georgian Dream [Party] or pro-UNM made everyone abstain from enrollment" in the initiative, Kuprashvili said.

Jangirashvili noted that after the incident, TV MR GE did become more transparent, inviting its clients to see how its surveys are conducted. Media representatives were even taken to some of the houses included in the survey. Despite their support for TV MR GE in the fight against the revenue service, almost all panelists remain critical of the company and question its methodology, selection criteria, and representativeness.

TV MR GE does not measure regional broadcast markets, according to the panelists. Regional media outlets want to conduct viable research and use people meters, but survey companies fail to show interest in any collaboration. "How can it be explained when you approach a seller and ask for the price of its product, but receive no quote at all?" Kuprashvili asked. Absence of reliable data also complicates regional media's efforts to attract advertising money.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.caf.epfound.ge/20116/Sessions>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.media.ge/ge/portal/news/303277/>

<sup>19</sup> <http://rustavi2.com/ka/news/5832>

<sup>20</sup> Who needs TV ratings [www.radiotavisupleba.ge](http://www.radiotavisupleba.ge)

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Georgia Objective Score: 2.53

There is a lack of solidarity and cooperation within the media sector, according to the panelists. A handful of trade and professional associations work side by side to promote the interests of individual journalists and media companies, but “this function is usually borne by NGOs, and only happens when the case causes great public interest,” noted Zhizhilashvili.

The organizations that have been active for years continue to advocate for better policies and standards and ensuring the development of professional media. These organizations include GCJE, GYLA, GARB, Georgian Regional Media Association, Georgian Press Association, Eurasia Partnership Foundation, and a number of other organizations.

Some panelists stated that job security for journalists, which remained a problematic issue in 2014, is a focus for these associations. Zhizhilashvili pointed out that journalists sometimes work without formal employment contracts.

GARB is a vibrant institution that lobbies for the interests of regional broadcast media. The organization usually is involved in the policy debates surrounding general media legislation and the media environment in the country.

GCJE’s popularity increased notably over the past year, the panelists said. Currently the group has more than 260 members, according to Kuprashvili, who chaired GCJE in

2014. Throughout 2014, more than 60 complaints against media members were submitted to GCJE. Most complaints were lodged by regular citizens, public officials, and media representatives. “Rather than going to the courts, people appeal to us,” Kuprashvili said. “The charter has become a good platform for citizens to launch complaints against the media,” and the media sector is ready to cooperate, she added.

One complaint was brought by a non-governmental organization, The Young Advocates, against Rustavi 2’s evening talk show *Choices*. Rustavi 2 anchor Giorgi Gabunia was accused of linking the activities of The Young Advocates with the Georgian Dream Party and the Ministry of Interior. In another case, the Georgian health insurance company GPI Holding filed a complaint against a journalist for allegedly distorting facts intentionally when reporting on a case related to GPI.

GCJE has broadened the scope of its work by monitoring the state of Georgian media and offering training programs to journalists. For example, in 2014 GCJE completed research on ethical coverage of children in media and conducted a study on Georgian self-government through a gender lens. GCJE also offered classes to producers and editors on ethics and regulations.

As in past years, the GYLA Media Legal Defense Center continues to protect the interests of media companies and individuals in courts, providing them with legal advice. But their activities have subsided slowly due to the lack of funding, according to Tsetskhladze. She said that the services of GYLA and other supporting organizations are critical for media outlets confronted with legal challenges.

The U.S. government and the European Union contribute significantly to the improvement of Georgian media by providing grants and sponsorships for various central and regional media outlets. USAID continues assisting Georgian media through the Media for Transparent and Accountable Governance (M-TAG) project. The key component of M-TAG is developing sustainability among select regional media outlets.

The panelists’ views differed on the quality of journalism education in Georgia. A number of panelists noted that there are more programs for prospective journalists in Tbilisi, while other panelists said that they see no difference in the quality of education offered to young journalists in cities outside of the capital. According to Kuprashvili, some universities are oriented toward instilling the values of yellow journalism in their students. Overall, members of the panel lamented that most young journalists lack the technical and analytical skills required to secure a job. Mtvlishvili said that Kakheti Information Center had

### SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

#### SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of media owners and managers and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists’ rights and promote quality journalism.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs exist providing substantial practical experience.
- > Short-term training and in-service training institutions and programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of media equipment, newsprint, and printing facilities are apolitical, not monopolized, and not restricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, cable, Internet, mobile) are apolitical, not monopolized, and not restricted.
- > Information and communication technology infrastructure sufficiently meets the needs of media and citizens.



difficulty in hiring interns because most applicants failed to pass the test on technical competency.

In 2012, Tbilisi State University (TSU) forged a deal with Germany's Deutsche Welle Akademie to provide journalism students with training on topics such as freedom of speech and media regulations. These classes were extended to TSU professors in 2014.

In general, Georgia has plenty of training courses available for journalists and news outlets. For example, Tsetskhladze's online netgazeti.ge cooperates with France Canal International to provide courses tailored for needs of journalists who publish online. Some panelists expressed the view that this approach is most effective—gearing courses toward a specific audience or the needs of individual companies. Another group of panelists disagreed, and believe that there is an inadequate pool of potential trainees. Nino Danelia said, "Every time I enter the training room, I know who I will see there." Mikashvidze added that there should be training opportunities for all levels, starting with basic skills to classes for more advanced journalists and media managers. Other panelists suggested that there should be more hands-on training programs in blogging and social media.

Most printing houses are owned privately and the print industry is apolitical. Likewise, procuring equipment needed by the media is free of undue interference by the government.

With regard to print media distribution, Mamaladze gave an example of a monopoly attempt by the Press Distribution Association. The association was formed in 2012 as a conglomerate of large publishing companies. According to unverified reports, roughly GEL 1.5 million (\$675,000) was invested yearly in the association. The business was managed poorly, with the association pre-paying the newspapers while not monitoring how many copies were actually sold. This created financial problems in 2014 that resulted in court cases against the staff in charge of daily sales. Ultimately, the association went into debt, and in 2014 started its liquidation process.

According to the recent amendments to the Law on Electronic Communications, one multiplex was granted to Georgian TeleradioCenter free of charge. Georgian TeleradioCenter is obliged to carry the programs of GPB. The Institute for Development of Freedom of Information claimed in its report<sup>21</sup> that 100 percent of the shares of Ltd. Georgian TeleradioCenter belong to the government. Kuprashvili said that this might impact GPB's content,

<sup>21</sup> Regulating Georgia's terrestrial digital broadcasting: Recommendations on recent changes in the law on electronic communications, retrieved from <https://idfi.ge/public/upload/pdf/Research/DSO%20Research.pdf>

although according the law on broadcasting, the channel should be distanced from any political influence.

4G broadband Internet will become available for Georgians in 2015, which will make Internet access in regions less complicated. It will increase speed, coverage, and availability across different devices such as smartphones, PCs, and tablets.

## List of Panel Participants

**Nino Danelia**, journalism professor, Ilia State University; member, Old GPB board

**Nino Jangirashvili**, director, TV Kavkasia, Tbilisi

**Natia Kuprashvili**, executive director, Georgian Association of Regional Television Broadcasters, Tbilisi

**Ia Mamaladze**, chairperson, Georgian Regional Media Association; publisher, *Guria News*, Chokhatauri

**Maia Tabagari**, director, Imedi TV news service, Tbilisi

**Nino Narimanishvili**, editor, *Samkhretis Karibche*, Akhaltsikhe

**Gela Mtvlishvili**, director, Kakheti Information Center, Gurjaani

**Ekaterine Tsimakuridze**, coordinator, Georgian Media Legal Defense Center, Georgian Young Lawyers Association, Tbilisi

**Zaal Anjaparidze**, senior program manager Eurasia Partnership Foundation, Tbilisi

**Maia Mikashvidze**, professor of journalism, Georgian Institute of Public Affairs, Tbilisi

**Nestan Tsetskhladze**, editor-in-chief, Netgazeti.ge, Tbilisi

**Dimitri Avaliani**, journalist, *Tabula* magazine, Tbilisi

**Natia Abramia**, independent media expert, Tbilisi

**Nino Zhizhilashvili**, director of news service and anchor, Maestro TV (at time of panel discussion); dean, Caucasus School of Media, Tbilisi

## Moderator

**Ekaterina Basilaia**, Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi

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