

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX

2016

**The Development
of Sustainable
Independent Media
in Georgia**



MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2016

The Development of Sustainable Independent Media in Georgia

www.irex.org/msi

Copyright © 2016 by IREX

IREX

1275 K Street, NW, Suite 600

Washington, DC 20005

E-mail: msi@irex.org

Phone: (202) 628-8188

Fax: (202) 628-8189

www.irex.org

Managing editor: Leon Morse

IREX project and editorial support: Lee Ann Grim

Editorial support: Dayna Kerecman Myers, Tara Susman-Peña, Robert Zabel, Neetha Tangirala

Copyeditors: Carolyn Feola de Rugamas, Carolyn.Ink; Kelly Kramer, WORDtoWORD
Editorial Services

Translation support: Ultra Translate, LLC

Design and layout: OmniStudio

Printer: Westland Enterprises, Inc.

Notice of Rights: Permission is granted to display, copy, and distribute the MSI in whole or in part, provided that: (a) the materials are used with the acknowledgement "The Media Sustainability Index (MSI) is a product of IREX with funding from USAID."; (b) the MSI is used solely for personal, noncommercial, or informational use; and (c) no modifications of the MSI are made.

Acknowledgment: This publication was made possible through support provided by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under Cooperative Agreement No. AID-OAA-A-14-00093.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed herein are those of the panelists and other project researchers and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or IREX.

ISSN 1546-0878

USAID

USAID is the lead U.S. Government agency that works to end extreme global poverty and enable resilient, democratic societies to realize their potential.

In an interconnected world, instability anywhere around the world can impact us here at home. Working side-by-side with the military in active conflicts, USAID plays a critical role in our nation's effort to stabilize countries and build responsive local governance; we work on the same problems as our military using a different set of tools. We also ease the transition between conflict and long-term development by investing in agriculture, health systems, and democratic institutions. And while USAID can work in active conflict, or help countries transition from violence, the most important thing we can do is prevent conflict in the first place. This is smarter, safer, and less costly than sending in soldiers.

USAID extends help from the American people to achieve results for the poorest and most vulnerable around the world. That assistance does not represent a Democratic value or a Republican value, but an American value; as beneficiaries of peace and prosperity, Americans have a responsibility to assist those less fortunate so we see the day when our assistance is no longer necessary.

USAID invests in ideas that work to improve the lives of millions of men, women, and children by:

- Investing in agricultural productivity so countries can feed their people
- Combating maternal and child mortality and deadly diseases like HIV, malaria and tuberculosis
- Providing life-saving assistance in the wake of disaster
- Promoting democracy, human rights and good governance around the world
- Fostering private sector development and sustainable economic growth
- Helping communities adapt to a changing environment
- Elevating the role of women and girls throughout all our work

IREX

IREX is an international nonprofit organization providing thought leadership and innovative programs to promote positive lasting change globally.

We enable local individuals and institutions to build key elements of a vibrant society: quality education, independent media, and strong communities. To strengthen these sectors, our program activities also include conflict resolution, technology for development, gender, and youth.

Founded in 1968, IREX has an annual portfolio of over \$70 million and a staff of over 400 professionals worldwide. IREX employs field-tested methods and innovative uses of technologies to develop practical and locally-driven solutions with our partners in more than 100 countries.

Implementing Partners

IREX wishes to thank the following organizations that coordinated the fieldwork for and authored a number of the studies herein:

Mediacentar Sarajevo <http://www.media.ba>

BTC ProMedia (Bulgaria) <http://www.btcpromedia.org>

Institute for Advanced Studies GAP (Kosovo) <http://www.gapinstitute.org/>

Legal Media Center (Kazakhstan)

Media Development Center (Macedonia) <http://mdc.org.mk>

Independent Journalism Center (Moldova) <http://ijc.md/eng/>

Media LTD (Montenegro) <http://www.media.cg.yu/index.htm>

Center for Independent Journalism (Romania) <http://www.cji.ro/>



GEORGIA

Georgia

Objective 1 through Objective 5.....	1
Objective 6.....	17
Methodology.....	23

On a positive note, the panelists said that it has become highly unpopular for media outlets to dodge ethical standards, especially when reporting about children.



GEORGIA

A year ahead of the parliamentary elections, an ownership struggle over Rustavi2 TV created a drama with high stakes for media freedom in Georgia. Kibar Khalvashi claimed that he was forced by ex-President Mikheil Saakashvili to relinquish his shares in 2006. He successfully sued Rustavi2's current owners to demand that the television station be returned. The case was accompanied by a series of injunctions by the city court judge, who made negative remarks about Rustavi2's content in his opinion, which appointed interim management for the channel. Prior to these verdicts, fearing that Khalvashi might push for a speedy execution of the court decision, a Rustavi2 lawyer appealed to the Constitutional Court seeking a stay on the immediate enforcement of the city court verdict.

Rustavi2 is linked with the United National Movement (UNM) right-wing party and is seen as an outspoken critic of the current establishment. Nika Gvaramia, director of the channel, accused the government of attempting to silence a critical voice. Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili then declared, "This is a private ownership dispute between the two parties," signaling that the government had no intention of interfering.

Startled by these developments, Georgian media, civil society, and international organizations called on the government and the court to ensure media freedom guarantees in the process. The courts partially modified the verdict concerning interim management, reinstating Gvaramia as the station director.

Mid-year, the country pulled off a successful transition to digital broadcasting after a relatively short period of time—less than two years. Despite risks of political manipulation during the switch, the government managed to run the entire process smoothly, avoiding such interference, panelists said. On the other hand, shortcomings in the switchover's technical execution left some rural areas without access.

The beginning of the year brought amendments to the Law on Advertising, in keeping with EU directives, which limit television advertising time and sponsorship services. While none of the panelists or other industry experts argued against the amendments, many have criticized the rush around its enactment. They expressed concern that it negatively impacted the advertising market in a year when the currency was severely weakened, causing the market to shrink by around 17 percent compared with the previous year.

The media faced other challenges in 2015, including the stalled election of two members of the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) board of trustees; rising concern over the infiltration of pro-Russian narratives in Georgian media; and the closure of the Georgian Media Legal Defense Center at Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA), which left journalists without legal support. On a positive note, the panelists said that it has become highly unpopular for media outlets to dodge ethical standards, especially when reporting about children. Reflecting all of these developments, the overall MSI score slid just slightly.

GEORGIA at a glance

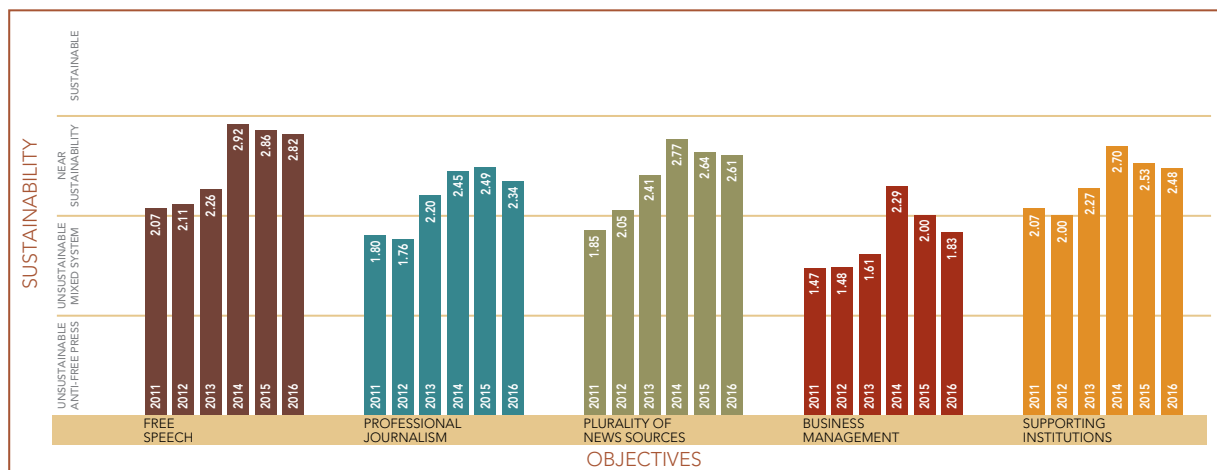
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 4,931,226 million (2015 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 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Orthodox Christian 83.9%, Muslim 9.9%, Armenian-Gregorian 3.9%, Catholic 0.8%, other 0.8%, none 0.7% (2002 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages:** Georgian 71% (official), Russian 9%, Armenian 7%, Azeri 6%, other 7% (2015 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2014-Atlas):** \$16.74 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2016)
- > **GNI per capita (2014-PPP):** \$7,510 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2016)
- > **Literacy rate:** 99.8%; male 99.8%, female 99.7 % (2015 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Giorgi Margvelashvili (since October 27, 2013)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active media outlets:** Print: 313 newspapers (National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2015); Television: 41 satellite, 54 digital terrestrial and 76 cable channels; Radio Stations: 76 (Georgian National Communications Commission, 2015)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** *Rezonansi* (4,000–5,000 daily), *Kviris Palitra* (55,000 weekly) (individual newspaper claims)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** Highest rated television stations: Rustavi2 (4.94%), Imedi (3.89%), Comedy Channel (1.09%), Maestro (1.03%), Chanel 1 (0.66%) (TV MR GE, 2015)
- > **Annual advertising revenue in the media sector:** Television: approximately \$30 million; Radio: \$4.5 million (Georgian National Communication Commission, GNCC analytical portal, 2015)
- > **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, Aianews.ge, Kakheti Information Center, Primitimenews.ge, Kvemo Kartli Information Center, Mtkheta-Tianeti Information Center, for.ge, Frontnews, civil.ge, agenda.ge, economic.ge (www.yellowpages.ge).
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** Television: \$146 million; Print: \$48 million; Radio: \$11 million; Internet: \$86 million (2015 est., All-Ukrainian Advertising Coalition)
- > **Internet subscribers:** 581,813 (Georgian National Communications Commission, 2015)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: GEORGIA



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://irex.org/system/files/u105/MENA_MSI_Score_Compilation.xls

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Georgia Objective Score: 2.82

The panelists' evaluation of indicator 1, covering legal and social norms protecting and promoting free speech, fell this year; it was the only indicator within Objective 1 to experience much change since last year. The drop was largely the result of the Rustavi2 ownership struggle. Still, the owners resolved the case without creating a dangerous precedent, through the help of the separation of powers between executive, legislative, and judiciary branches; civil society organization advocacy; and pressure from international organizations and diplomatic missions.

In regard to the legal environment, media experts continue to say that the main problem is not the laws, but their implementation. Freedom of speech is protected legislation and regulations that, the panelists said, are among the region's best.

In the Rustavi2 case, the city court judge's justification of his decision to hand over the interim management of the channel from its current directorship to a temporary director outraged the panelists the most. They were ruffled particularly over his statement that leaving the current managers of Rustavi2 in place would "possibly affect the format of [Rustavi2] activities, might lead to cancellation

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.

and/or modification of several programs, including the most watched ones; and, therefore, there also exists a threat for the attention of the Broadcasting Company Rustavi2 and its staff to be directed solely towards the coverage of the ongoing [court] dispute." He continued: "This would not only undermine the ratings of the company and its financial status, but would also create a serious threat for the media to lose its main role and function—protection of public interest."¹

The management decision came on November 5, two days after the judge ruled that company shares should be handed back to the plaintiff. The Rustavi2 lawyer protested the verdicts, and media organizations, rights groups, and civil society and international organizations expressed their concerns as well. As Civil Georgia reported, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatović asserted: "Editorial decisions should be made in newsrooms, not courtrooms." U.S. Ambassador to Georgia Ian Kelly warned, "Attempts to change the management of the station, in advance of the appeal process, have profound political implications. In a democratic society, critical opinions should be encouraged, not silenced."²

Panelists said the verdict offers a perfect example of the government's attempts to exert a firm grip on independent media—in the instance of Rustavi2, the most watched television station in the country. The most recent data from TVMR, Nielsen Television Audience Measurement's official licensee, show that at the end of December, 29.43 percent of television viewers watched Rustavi2.

Nata Dzvelishvili, executive director of the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics (GCJE), shared her view: "I believe that the court verdict, with remarks about the content of Rustavi2, was noteworthy and posed a risk to the freedom of speech and expression." Nino Danelia, an independent media expert and a communications professor at Ilia State University, expressed the belief that the rulings by the presiding judge in the case, Tamaz Urtmelidze, constituted direct involvement in the station's editorial policy.

Rustavi2 and its supporters have long questioned the credibility of the city court judge, positing that criminal charges brought against Urtmelidze's mother while he was presiding over the Rustavi2 case rendered him vulnerable to government influence.³ Although there is no direct proof stating that Khalvashi is linked to the government, critics note that his sister Pati Khalvashi is a lawmaker of the

¹ "Judge Orders Rustavi2 TV's Chief Executives to Be Replaced." *Civil Georgia*. Nov. 6, 2015. www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=28748

² "In Quotes: Int'l Reactions to Rustavi2 TV Case." *Civil Georgia*. Nov. 7, 2015. www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=28756

³ "Georgia's Rustavi2 Case: Was Justice Served?" *Eurasianet's Weekly Digest*. Nov. 16, 2015. <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/76111>

Nata Dzelishvili, executive director of the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics (GCJE), shared her view: “I believe that the court verdict, with remarks about the content of Rustavi 2, was noteworthy and posed a risk to the freedom of speech and expression.”

ruling Georgian Dream Coalition party. Some panelists also criticized the High Council of Justice of Georgia’s backing of Urtmelidze’s remarks about the media. Independent media expert Zviad Koridze said that it is dangerous that a state institution has commented on the media’s performance and it “tells you that it is legitimate to limit the freedom of speech.”

Amid the legal standoff over Rustavi2, the Ukrainian website uarevo.in.ua published secretly recorded conversations between Saakashvili and Gvaramia discussing how to defend Rustavi2. “Get boeviks [a Russian term for fighters] who will defend [apparently the Rustavi2 TV offices], because eventually it will definitely end up with shooting,” Saakashvili told Gvaramia, *civil.ge* reported. Gvaramia confirmed the conversation and contended that the leaked recordings prove his previous allegations about the government blackmailing him, threatening to expose his personal life and recordings unless he steps down as the director of Rustavi2.⁴

Prime Minister Garibashvili and ex-Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili—the latter accused by Rustavi2 supporters supervising the case from behind the scenes—fended off the allegations. President Giorgi Margvelashvili admitted the case was a “problem,” and said, “Everyone must remember that free media is of supreme value in contemporary Georgia.”⁵

Nino Jangirashvili, director of the small television company TV Kavkasia, said the successful handling of the case relates to the fact that the two major political forces (the Georgian Dream Coalition and United National Movement) balance each other by being dispersed at various levels of the government.

⁴ “Wiretapped Recordings of Saakashvili Discussing Rustavi2 TV Leaked.” *Civil.ge*. Oct. 30, 2015. www.civil.ge/eng/_print.php?id=28713

⁵ “President: Recent Developments in Georgian Media ‘Triggers Serious Questions.’” *Civil.ge*. Oct. 3, 2015. www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=28620/http://rustavi2.com/en/news/27902

“What worked is that the government is multifaceted,” Danelia said. “What worked is that the court is not ruled by one person only. Different branches of the government have acquired the monitoring functions for one another because they are influenced by different political forces. For example, the Constitutional Court is under United National Movement. During the previous government, the executive, legislative, and judiciary powers were under the control of one person, one party. We don’t have this now.”

In the beginning of the year, the Public Defender’s Office lodged a lawsuit in the Constitutional Court against the highly controversial legislative amendments on secret surveillance to the Law on Electronic Communication. The lawsuit claimed the amendments do not protect privacy rights as enshrined in the country’s constitution. Media experts pointed out that the existing legislation does not guarantee journalist privacy, and hands law enforcement easy access to telephone and Internet operators.

In June 2015, amendments were proposed to Article 2391 of the Criminal Code of Georgia, adding “calls for violent actions” among the list of criminal offenses. The initial draft bill contained confusing wording, according to some of the panelists. Andguladze said that the initial version of the bill carried the danger that failure to properly use the definition would “easily squelch the freedom of expression of the media and beyond; but it was fixed afterwards.” The wording was revised from “calls inciting strife” to “calls for violent actions aimed at causing discord between racial, religious, national, ethnic, social, linguistic or other groups.” The article also specifies that criminal punishment be applied only if such calls pose direct and obvious threats.⁶ Still, Andguladze said, “the existing legislation is sufficient to ensure that hate speech is not practiced.”

A few panelists said that Georgian society is becoming less likely to pressure the media into repressing certain themes. Jangirashvili said that 2015 saw significant improvements in this regard. “Even themes related with religion are covered more openly... There is definitely an improvement,” she noted.

The switchover to digital terrestrial broadcasting—another major event of the year according to the panelists—started in July 2015, and was a success from legal, political, and technological perspectives. The Georgian National Communication Commission (GNCC), the media regulator in charge of the process, was apolitical in its work, the panelists added.

⁶ “Bill That Would Have Criminalized ‘Strife-Inciting Calls’ Revised.” *Civil.ge*. Apr. 7, 2015. www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=28184

Following the switchover, authorities abolished general and special licensing for television broadcasters. Content producers now are allowed to enter the television broadcasting market through a simplified authorization procedure. Panelists noted a risk: that the switchover could potentially result in monopolization of the media market, creating barriers for media. But that did not happen. “Anyone can get an authorization. There are plenty of places in multiplexes,” said Jangirashvili, whose television company operates a multiplex along with three other partners. “This government has been treating the process quite fairly; [the government] took into consideration the advice and concern of almost every interested party. This market is free. We were even reimbursed the licensing fees.”

Jangirashvili observed that the digital switchover legislation is vague regarding the criteria that multiplex operators can use to grant access to broadcasters. “The law stipulates that there are three priority criteria regarding who shall be granted access to a multiplex. The first is using HD broadcast format, the second one is the order (e.g. who applied first), and the third one is that the priority should be given to those broadcasters satisfying the terms of general broadcasting. So, I have a question here—if I have only two spots available in my multiplex, which of these three criteria should I use for granting access to broadcasters?” Natia Kuprashvili, director of the Georgian Association of Regional Broadcasters (GARB), explained that GNCC is preparing a set of amendments to be included in the Law on Electronic Communication and the Law on Broadcasting.

Radio remains on an analog platform; therefore, broadcasters require a license to use radio frequencies. Online broadcasters also require authorization. Mamuka Andguladze, media program officer at the Council of Europe, said that besides the benefits that small online broadcasters can obtain through authorization, the procedure also imposes on them all those responsibilities of authorized regular television broadcasters. “The problem is in the approach; these two platforms [small television broadcaster and online media outlet] differ dramatically,” Andguladze emphasized.

Panelists agreed that media professionals are subject to physical attacks, but the public is not always aware. Dzelishvili said that verbal attacks happen often in social media, and the evidence is easily deleted. Gela Mtvilishvili, director of Kakheti Information Center, recalled how the media relations advisor to the Minister of Defense, Imeda Darsalia, publicly threatened to punch him in the jaw on Facebook.

“Our public servants have very small understanding of the importance of freedom of information, and of the fact that freedom of information is not for journalists only. Rather, it should be the right of every citizen,” Koridze said.

Transparency International reported 15 cases of mistreatment of the media⁷ in the past two years, in the form of physical and verbal abuse by public officials. According to the report, the most frequent victims are journalists in the regions of Adjara and Kakheti, while several instances of such pressure were also documented in Guria, Imereti, Samegrelo, Kartli, and Samtskhe-Javakheti.

Nino Narimanishvili, editor-in-chief of *Samkhretis Karibche*, published in the minority-populated Akhaltsikhe region, shared an incident that took place there. When she was covering a fire at the house of a relative of the head of the local mayor’s Department of Infrastructure, the owner verbally abused her and threatened to smash her cameras. She said she made a public statement, but the police did not react.

Ekaterine Tsimakuridze, coordinator at GYLA, said that sometimes investigations start but they never seem to end, pending eternally at the prosecutor’s office. Upon receiving a request, the prosecutor’s office refused to disclose statistics on pending cases under investigation.

In August 2015, Imedi TV announced a temporary suspension of political and public interest shows, shutting down two programs: *Reaktsia* (Reaction) and *Imedis Kvira* (*Imedi Week*). Some months before the closure, anchor Inga Grigolia claimed that the ruling party had pressured her and attempted to influence the talk-show agenda. In September, the Georgian Public Broadcaster discontinued Eka Mishveladze’s talk show, *Pirveli Studia*. Channel managers declared that the decision was related to the conflicts of interest caused by Mishveladze’s marriage with Alexi Petriashvili, deputy chief of the Free Democrats party.

Various watchdog organizations, alarmed by the threatened suspensions, appealed for media diversity and political processes in the country ahead of the 2016 elections. GPB invited Mishveladze to host a renewed talk show in the

⁷ “Pressure on Regional Media.” *Transparency International*. Oct. 13, 2015. www.transparency.ge/en/blog/pressure-regional-media?page=4

beginning of 2016, and Imedi TV launched a new political talk show, *Shalva Ramihvili's Show*. Maia Mikashvidze, an independent media expert and communications professor at Ilia State University, asserted, "This is not just happenstance, as it occurs right before the elections. When the talk shows are suspended, they always say that the decision is part of the editorial policy and they will launch a new and better one."

Last year saw a stalemate over the GPB Board of Trustees that has dragged on without resolution for almost two years now, with two empty chairs on the board. Largely acclaimed by media professionals and civil society, the 2013 amendments to the Law on Broadcasting introduced the two-seat quota for minority representatives (from UNM), for a total of nine members. Most panelists agreed that the political control of the broadcaster is explicit. Some panelists also viewed the appointment of the channel's head of information service as a political decision. Jangirashvili questioned the professional skills and knowledge of Giorgi Gvimradze, the political scientist who landed the position in October. "If he doesn't know how to prepare the content, how can he assess journalistic work? How can he instruct journalists?"

Libel has been a civil offense since 2004. Panelists recalled only one case in 2015 in which a media outlet was taken to court. Mamuka Khazaradze, the president of one of the richest private banks in Georgia, TBC-Bank, won a case against the Georgian tabloid *Asaval Dasavali* on defamation charges. The case relates to a 2014 series of articles blaming Khazaradze for physically assaulting the leader of the 1980s national movement, dissident Merab Kostava. The articles also accused Khazaradze of misappropriation of the assets of Elit-Electronics and Borjomi Company, and an attempt to drive the Goodwill Company to bankruptcy. In lodging the lawsuit against the newspaper, Khazaradze requested GEL 160,000 (\$70,000) in compensation. According to the ruling, *Asaval Dasavali* will have to apologize for spreading defamatory allegations against Khazaradze.

Access to public information worsened in the past year, according to most of the panelists. Mtvlishvili said he prepared 40 administrative complaints in 2015 against public organizations. "It is commonplace... This complicates everything, as it is much harder for a journalist to prepare a complaint than it is for an average person. On one occasion, I won a case against the Kakheti governor, and it took 12 months," he said.

According to an Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI) report, between January and November 2015 the responsiveness of public organizations dropped to

86 percent (from 90 percent in 2012-13). The report named the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Economic Sustainability and Development, and Administration of the Government of Georgia among the least open organizations.⁸

Panelists complained that public agencies' most frequently cited reason for withholding public information is privacy rights and personal data protection. Nestan Tsetsckhladze, a marketing manager for Netgazeti.ge, said that she requested information about herself to test the legislation. In the beginning, the Ministry of Interior showed willingness to help, but eventually stopped responding. Despite this, Tsetsckhladze said, the tools for requesting information make the entire process more convenient now. The Data Exchange Agency launched an open data portal, data.gov.ge, in 2015 as part the country's Open Government Partnership (OGP) initiative. The portal allows government institutions to post data that can be freely accessed, used, and reused, in open formats. But few public organizations are listed on its menu.

Currently, the norms and restrictions on public information are scattered across various laws and legal provisions. Dzvelishvili mentioned that in the frame of the OGP, lawmakers are preparing a Freedom of Information Act, which will replace all the existing norms. "The legislative amendments will enforce stricter sanctions against organizations that decline to provide public information, and will also introduce an Ombudsman's Institute," she said.

"Our public servants have very little understanding of the importance of freedom of information, and of the fact that freedom of information is not for journalists only. Rather, it should be the right of every citizen," Koridze said.

All panelists agreed that access to foreign sources of information is free for the media. However, Dzvelishvili stressed that online media outlets are negligent regarding intellectual property rights and copyright laws when using various foreign sources.

The government does not restrict access to the profession at the university level, and entrance to the field is largely free. Bloggers and freelance journalists require authorization to attend press briefings and gain access to public organizations. Some panelists noted cases in which bloggers, freelance journalists, and photographers were denied accreditation just because they did not belong to a specific media outlet.

⁸ "Access to Public Information in Georgia - Report Summarizing 2010 - 2015." *Institute for Development of Freedom of Information*. Dec. 11, 2015. <https://idfi.ge/en/access-to-public-information-in-georgia-report-summarizing-2010%E2%80%932015>

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Georgia Objective Score: 2.34

Media outlets that meet professional norms and standards are few in the country, and the political fealties of some media spurred the panelists to question Georgian journalists' professionalism and neutrality. These shortcomings explain the slight dip in the Objective 2 score this year.

"You may have a penchant for certain political beliefs... but your objective should be informing those for whom you write an article or prepare a news report so that they learn more, not because you have to pay lip service to the owners," Koridze said.

A momentous statement by Rustavi2 director Nika Gvaramia, regarding the ideological preferences of the channel at a public debate on *Reflections: Media and Ideological Values*, sparked an argument on the standards of neutrality and balance in the Georgian media. During a discussion on September 22 at Frontline Georgia, a media club that serves as a neutral venue, Gvaramia announced that his channel follows a right-wing centrist ideology. "When UNM departed from the chosen path of serving the ideology, Rustavi2 made a mistake by following the party," Gvaramia added. Some panelists said that after Gvaramia's announcement, Georgian journalists will have to revalue professional standards of neutrality and impartiality in producing media content.

"Rustavi2 said directly that it represents the side; [it said] 'I'm the television with the worldview.' This is fairly new in our reality. If before this was disguised, now it has become

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).

trendy to talk about it... And there is Obiektivi TV, which said 'I do what I want to do.' As if it has become common practice that [professional] standards are not important and are not required anymore," Jangrashvili said.

Still, media members have been discussing ethical standards more, some panelists said. The government's broadcast code of conduct sets regulations for broadcasters, consequently making Georgian broadcast media more inclined to maintain quality. To strengthen the practices of ethical reporting on children's issues, some national and regional broadcasters imposed additional self-regulatory mechanisms by signing a memorandum of understanding prepared by the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics and UNICEF.⁹ Jangirashvili said that she is skeptical, claiming that Kavkasia TV can fulfill the duties outlined in the broadcast law without additional tools. "If I make a mistake, I will try to repair it myself," she said. "I don't need anyone's complaint, and I don't agree to obligating myself to certain regulations that otherwise are not envisioned by the law [on broadcasting]."

Still, hate speech, sensationalism, and plagiarism are prevalent in mainstream Georgian media. Media Development Foundation (MDF) examined these practices in its study, "Financing of Media Outlets Spreading Anti-Western Sentiments and Hate Speech from the State Budget, 2015." The study identified the television company Obieqtivi as affiliated with the Union of Georgian Traditionalists, and newspapers *Sakartvelos Respublika*, *Alia*, and *Asaval Dasavali* among those outlets that promote hate speech and anti-Western rhetoric.

In October 2015, the online media picked up and circulated footage of sexual abuse posted on the Ukrainian website *Tube.ua*.¹⁰ The videos were originally discovered in the Georgian city of Zugdidi in 2013. Some parts of the video materials were destroyed upon their finding; others were kept for investigation purposes. Dzvelishvili said that the footage went viral instantaneously, with online media considering certain ethical aspects or professional standards.

In terms of quality, Georgia has a handful of print and online publications providing in-depth and highly professional reporting. They include magazine *Liberali*, *netgazeti.ge*, the newspaper *Batumelebi*, and *24Saati.ge*. Other quality online news services available in the Georgian language are *civil.ge*, with its new analytical portal, *The Clarion*; and the Georgian service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

⁹ "Ethical Reporting on Children and Self-Regulation Mechanisms – Memorandum of Understanding with Broadcasters." UNICEF. www.unicef.org/ceecis/media_28340.html

¹⁰ "Civil Society Groups Condemn PM's 'Violence-Instigating' Remarks." *Civil.ge*. www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=28687

“You may have a penchant for certain political beliefs...but your objective should be informing those for whom you write an article or prepare a news report so that they learn more, not because you have to pay lip service to the owners,” Koridze said.

Self-censorship is practiced, but hard to detect, panelists said. Kuprashvili contended that the ideological media might easily verge on censorship and compel the journalists to self-censor. “If the discourse says that ideological media is acceptable, the same discourse might say that certain events that are unacceptable to the ideology shall be censored.” Jangirashvili recalled a recent case involving the father-in-law of the prime minister, aired on Kavkasia TV. She said that even though there were journalists from other media outlets covering the case, their reports did not get included elsewhere in the media.

Many of the panelists agreed that Georgian media report on key events. Some panelists said that if certain media outlets omit certain news for whatever reason, other outlets always step in.

Pay for journalists differs across media sectors and between the capital and the regions. “The marketplace is unbalanced, as some are paid tens of thousands and some not even a thousand,” said Koridze. An exploitative approach to internships has become more prevalent. Dzelishvili said that internships are mostly unpaid, and the rights of the interns are poorly protected. The interns accept unfair terms because they are interested in getting their foot in the door. Dzelishvili said that they are told they will eventually get contracts, sometimes even years later.

Media outlets commonly evade employment laws and keep journalists working without formal agreements. Tsetskladze said that some media managers engage in corrupt deals with advertisers to pay high salaries for their journalists. Andguladze noted that the revenues of the media outlets do not necessarily guarantee high salaries for journalists. He gave an example of Palitra holding, a media company with a big budget where journalists draw only slightly above average salaries.

Georgians have many choices for both entertainment and news, panelists said. They agreed that news and entertainment programs on most channels are balanced,

ensuring that entertainment programs do not override the news—even during prime time. The same balance is kept between entertainment and general license-holding channels in the country.

Following the digital switchover, broadcasting companies have been slow to make technical upgrades to their equipment, Kuprashvili said. Even Rustavi2, the country’s most innovative television channel, failed to change its equipment to HD. Kuprashvili said that regional broadcasters are especially suffering in the process, with some forced to take bank loans to cover the costs of the upgrade.

Niche journalism is scarce in Georgian media. Panelists expressed different views on what makes media outlets prioritize or downgrade niche journalism. Jangirashvili claimed that it is the sectorial difference between television and newspapers affecting the decision of television stations. Zurab Gumbaridze, executive director of Rustavi2 Sales House, disagreed, saying that the issue is connected more with the availability of resources. He noted that small publications with tight budgets might not be able to keep up with niche reporting requirements.

Nino Zuriashvili, an *investigative reporter* at Studio Monitor and chair of GCJE, said that investigative reporting is underdeveloped and media companies are reluctant to invest in the field. Although the law requires GPB to air investigative stories, its only such effort is the program Investigative Reporter. The program has been on the air since October 2014, but the panelists questioned its quality.

“Investigative reporting is a very big product,” Zuriashvili said. “It requires a lot of time; you delve into the themes and events, and your product comes slow. It needs a lot of effort. I understand that not everyone can spend so many resources. GPB should have them, but it does not... and nobody asks it. Instead, you can find some small online resources offering in-depth reporting and journalistic investigations.”

Studio Monitor (monitori.ge), a small investigative media outlet, is the only Georgian company that has been producing high-quality investigative content. The recipient of a number of awards and prizes, its programs were aired by Maestro TV once a month for the past several years. At end of 2015, Maestro TV decided to start own investigative programing and terminate the contract with Studio Monitor. Danelia expressed the belief that television companies are not interested in airing quality investigative programs, because they are afraid to lose their control over the content.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Georgia Objective Score: 2.61

Panelists said the diversity of news sources ensures a plurality of viewpoints in Georgian media; the score for this objective remained about the same as last year.

In the past few years, Georgian mainstream news outlets have re-affiliated along various political lines. Despite Gvaramia's claims that Rustavi2 follows a right-wing centrist ideology, some panelists said that its ties with UNM cannot be ignored. After the 2014 mass departure of the journalists from Maestro TV, and the statements by the channel's top management about the need to pursue values other than Western,¹¹ a pro-Russian narrative is believed to have penetrated the channel's content. Georgian Dream Studio (GDS) is owned by the billionaire Ivanishvili's family and run by his son. In March 2015, Ivanishvili launched the talk show *2030*, prepared by his organization and airing on GDS. The idea behind the program, as he explained, is to "change the media landscape"—which, he said, is dominated by the opposition UNM party's "agitation machine" Rustavi2.

Another major national broadcaster, Imedi TV, is not affiliated with any political party, but it aligns with the government, Danelia said. According to Transparency

¹¹ "Maestro TV Hit by Mass Departure of Journalists." *Civil.ge*. Dec. 24, 2014. <http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=27935>

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.

International,¹² in March 2015, Inga Grigolia, then-anchor of Imedi's political talk shows *Reaktsia* and *Imedis Kvira*, faced demands from the parliamentary majority of the Georgian Dream party that her shows not address information about the UNM's planned protest actions.

According to a survey¹³ conducted by CRRG for NDI, 87 percent of Georgians name television as their first source of information; 20 percent of television viewers watch the news on foreign channels; and out of those, the majority rely on Russian channels. Among the most watched are Russian Channel One, RTR, and Russia 1. CNN, Euronews, and BBC World Service share the fifth, sixth, and the eighth places on the list. Pro-Russian narrative can also be heard in some Georgian media as well.¹⁴

A study by MDF¹⁵ revealed that Obiektivi TV, known for spreading xenophobic, homophobic and anti-Western sentiment, relies on Russian sources. Obiektivi is included in standard packages of all major cable distributors, and broadcasts on Channel 25 in Batumi. In Tbilisi, Radio Obiektivi is available on FM 105.1. The same study reported openly pro-Russian editorial policies with the newspaper and Internet portal *Geworld.ge* and the news agency *Saqinformi* as well.

Georgia has two private national and 17 regional multiplexes (digital signal bundles), with an additional one that only GPB uses. IDFI, a NGO that took an active role in strategic planning and monitoring of the switchover, stated in an interim progress report that the multiplex system can carry a minimum of 20 and a maximum of 60 channels free-of-charge per multiplex. Those numbers are in contrast to the 10 free-of-charge channels available in any given location under the analog system.¹⁶ Georgian Teleradio Center is obligated by law to carry GPB programs exclusively in its multiplex.

In the roll-out of the digital switchover, Kuprashvili said that the government failed to guarantee the entire population's right to access information. According to Kuprashvili, about

¹² "Who Owns Georgia's Media." *Transparency International*. Oct. 19, 2015. www.transparency.ge/en/post/report/who-owns-georgia-s-media

¹³ "Public Attitudes in Georgia." *National Democratic Institute*. Apr. 2015. www.ndi.org/files/NDI%20Georgia_April%202015%20Poll_Public%20Issues_ENG_VF_0.pdf

¹⁴ "Russian Influence on Georgian NGOs and Media." *Institute for the Development of Freedom of Information*. Jul. 22, 2015. <https://idfi.ge/en/russian-influence-of-georgian-ngos-and-media>

¹⁵ Public Funds for Media Promoting Hate Speech and Anti-Western Sentiments." *Media Development Foundation*. 2015. <http://mdfgeorgia.ge/uploads/Report%20on%20Obiektivi%20&%20others,%20Eng.pdf>

¹⁶ Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI). <https://docs.google.com/viewerng/viewer?url=https://idfi.ge/public/upload/IDFI/Digital/shualeduri-angarishi-23.11.pdf>

50,000 set top boxes or digital convertors were sold, but a small number of people in the remote regions were left out. “And these are the places where newspaper circulation is almost non-existent—where Internet infrastructure is poor and where the people depend on the television,” she added.

Narimanishvili said that the predominantly Armenian-speaking Javakheti region, where people have always had difficulty receiving local news, is affected. Now the reception is even scarcer, and people will be compelled to watch Russian channels, she said.

Fiber-optic Internet remains a challenge, with access for less than half of the Georgian population, according to Tsetskhladze. Mobile Internet is available widely to people even outside the capital. According to the GNCC analytical portal, registered users for mobile Internet (persons and legal entities) is 1.566 million.

Tsetskhladze mentioned the project Internetization and Broadband Development of Georgia, funded by the Ivanishvili-owned Cartu Fund. The project is implemented under the auspices of the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development and will cost around \$150,000. It aims to set up fiber-optic Internet infrastructure in about 2,000 municipalities in the country, ensuring Internet penetration reaching 91 percent of the population. The project will be coordinated by the Innovation and Technology Agency of the Ministry; while Open Net and the German company Detecon, a member of Deutsche Telekom group, will be responsible for technical implementation.

A few panelists expressed their concern regarding the project’s sustainability in the aftermath of the 2016 fall parliamentary elections. “When we asked what happens if Georgian Dream party loses the elections in 2016, we didn’t receive an answer,” Tsetskhladze said.

As for new media and social media platforms, Facebook has been traditionally the most popular news source, with Twitter gaining traction. Approximately 1.8 million users are registered on Facebook in Georgia, according to Internet World Stats.¹⁷

Despite being slammed for its political messages, GPB has improved, some panelists said. “But it is not as good as we want it to be,” Kuprashvili added. When it comes to cultural and public affairs, public television does provide programming that differs from the private broadcasters.

In Koridze’s view, a main challenge of GPB is its absence of international reporting. “When the Paris attack happened, GPB did not go there. It did not go to Ukraine for an entire year, nor did it go to Turkey. Despite all the incidents, it

didn’t send a journalist... In other words, GPB tells you that you should be closed up in your own shell. I am very concerned with GPB’s lack of global vision,” he said. Dzelishvili added that GPB has little ambition to produce in-depth or timely reporting.

On the positive side, GPB’s talk show *Realuri Sivrtse* won a Georgian Institute of Public Affairs-Josh Friedman public service award for its in-depth coverage of the disputed Sakdrisi Gold mine case.

Georgia has ample news agencies providing all sorts of material, the panelists said. Jangirashvili mentioned that most are contracted by various state and public agencies. Mediachecker.ge, a portal monitoring the media’s performance, reported that press releases disseminated by contracting organizations comprise at least 80 percent of the content that news agencies supply. “Making the division between editorial content and content provided through a contracting party, i.e. state bodies, is a big issue,” Dzelishvili said. “For example, when the prime minister’s press office shared information about his visit to Paris, just by Googling the keywords, you would have found identical coverage in most news agencies with the identical title.”

Zura Vardiashvili, editor of *Liberali*, talked about his experience a few months ago, when he was contacted by a Ministry of Defense representative. The person was inquiring about the reasons for critical coverage of the ministry, and afterwards, he was asked a question: “Haven’t you signed an agreement with us?” Some days later, the ministry delivered the message that it might terminate its contract with the magazine.

Since the 2011 amendments to the Law on Broadcasting, which obligates media outlets to disclose information about their owners, media ownership has been fairly transparent. Nevertheless, Jangirashvili said that ambiguities exist regarding the ownership of Rustavi2. “Karamanashvili’s case is legendary. Everyone knows that they are not real owners. Transparency is ensured, so that the people can make judgments and conclusions, but there is no absolute transparency,” she said.

A Transparency International report¹⁸ that sought to update the ownership information of the major media outlets, including some new media, concluded that broadcasters have not made significant changes in ownership. The report further determined that several cable and Internet outlets are owned by anti-Western and religious organizations. “Their declared revenue is rather small, making it unclear

¹⁷ Internet World Stats www.internetworldstats.com/

¹⁸ “Who Owns Georgia’s Media.” *Transparency International*. www.transparency.ge/sites/default/files/post_attachments/who_owns_georgias_media.pdf

what resources these channels have been using to be able to broadcast,” the report stated.

The media sector has carried out important initiatives in recent years to ensure that ethnic minorities have access to information about public life in the country. *Samkhretis Karibche*, a small newspaper in the Javakheti region, manages to publish once every two weeks in Georgian and Armenian. The publication of the newspaper in Armenian was suspended in 2014 due to financial hardships, but was restored in October 2015 with the financial support of the U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi. GPB has a few newscasts offered in Armenian and Azerbaijani. Kuprashvili said that GARB produces substantial content in the languages of the minorities, but it is still not enough. The community radio station NOR debuted in the region in early 2015 in Russian, Armenian, and Georgian. Koridze expressed the belief that the positive impact of this station will be visible a few years from now.

Some panelists said that language barriers and scarcity of programming in minority languages widen the existing gap between the regions and the center of the country. More than the half of the population in minority-settled regions continue receiving their news from Russian channels, Mikashavidze said. Media outlets in the capital city are not keen on reporting the stories that are important to the minority-populated areas. Narimanishvili recounted that in the beginning of 2015, some media spread information about the distribution of Russian passports in Javakheti region, but mainstream Georgian media reporters never visited the place. “The situation is alarming,” Narimanishvili cautioned. “If we consider Javakheti region, I wonder how these people receive any news about this country, where they live. Nothing to say about the content diversity... And then they are surprised that people have pro-Russian sentiments.”

Kuprashvili said that sparse reporting in minority languages, and absence of the content relevant to them, also determines their viewership. Mikashavidze said that not knowing exactly what type of content is available about Georgia results from the lack of analysis and research of the media content. “We don’t offer an alternative, and we don’t know what they watch.”

Certain international topics catch the attention of the Georgian media, but coverage of international news is never systematic. Netgazeti.ge runs a section on the South Caucasus with daily updates of the events from the three Caucasus countries. Koridze said that if not for this section, it would be difficult to learn about current events in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Georgia Objective Score: 1.83

The decline in the Objective 4 score is a clear indication that the panelists do not see the media as operating as efficient and self-sustaining enterprises. That viewpoint is probably due to the weakening of the advertising market, along with the economic crisis in that shook the country in 2015.

“I believe that one of the challenges of the Georgian media is financial stability, because Georgian media are more dependent on donor money, as they are not able to cover their expenses from advertising revenues,” Dzvelishvili said. “In our country, media are seen as political instruments, and instead of using media as a platform for political debates, they attack the media.”

Gumbaridze provided statistics on advertising. “For the first time after 2009, the advertising market in 2015 shrank, dropping from around \$48 million the previous year to \$41 million,” he said. The economic crisis and streamlined changes made to the Law on Advertising in 2015 are the key reasons blamed for the decline. “It could be foreseen when the governing bodies decided to adopt EU directives in a rush and without considering all probable consequences,” Gumbaridze explained.

The Parliament of Georgia enacted the amendments to advertising regulations, limiting advertising time to 12 minutes per hour and four minutes for sponsorship services from April 1, 2015. The enactment was a rejection of suggestions of many media outlets and experts to postpone

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.

Gumbaridze provided statistics on advertising. “For the first time after 2009, the advertising market in 2015 shrank, dropping from around \$48 million the previous year to \$41 million,” he said.

enforcement to 2016. “The decision was based upon GNCC member Koba Bekauri’s inaccurate, page-long conclusion projecting that this [amendment] would increase the ad market,” said Gumbaridze.

The panelists noted that to address the challenges brought by the new legislation, national broadcasters raised advertising prices. Consequently, advertisers cut budgets for small-scale media but maintained advertising at Rustavi2 and Imedi TV, as these channels ensure national reach. According to Gumbaridze, although Rustavi2 had no increase this year, it still took some 61-62 percent of the total television advertising revenues. Around 31 percent went to Imedi TV, while Maestro’s revenues decreased significantly from the previous year’s GEL 6 million (\$2.7 million) to GEL 2 to GEL 3 million (\$890,000 to \$1.3 million). “Perhaps almost 98 percent of the total television advertising revenue is distributed among these three channels,” Gumbaridze said.

Forecasts for dispensing advertising money to small-size media outlets, in the wake of the amendments, were not realized. In fact, revenue for small and regional media diminished in 2015. Most media struggle to find multiple revenue sources to get by. Tsetskhladze said that Netgazeti.ge’s advertising is only 23 percent of its total income; the rest comes from international donors.

The digital switchover brought additional financial problems to regional media. Advertisers terminated long-term contracts with local media because they doubted the outlets’ ability to manage the switch to digital broadcasting.

The panelists agreed that available sources of revenue are not enough to support all current media. The fact that Rustavi2 became profitable in recent years is considered an anomaly, not an industry standard. The channel’s ratings are high and sales are efficient. “If tomorrow it happens that Imedi TV develops effective management and takes more market share, then...Rustavi2 will become ineffectual,” commented Gumbaridze. Jangirashvili further noted that the market is not stable, as all television channels require subsidies to function.

The economic crisis also forced businesses to cut down on advertising budgets. The market shrank considerably at the

expense of local businesses “because they were incapable of keeping up with rising advertising prices,” said Gumbaridze. He further explained that international companies have the luxury of maintaining advertising budgets when sales go down—something that local businesses cannot afford.

Jangirashvili offered a pessimistic overview of the 2016 market, claiming it would be “difficult” and “financially unstable” because of the emergence of the new measurement authority. The panelists argued that television companies and advertising agencies will have to either choose one or subscribe to both. This will further affect the already-stagnating market. Some panelists said that they see political interests in the launch of the second research agency. “It enters the market without the typical industry invitation,” said Gumbaridze.

Gumbaridze spoke of the trend with media in other countries, in which advertising revenues are becoming less important for broadcast media; while direct sales, such as cable payments and repeated reruns, become more significant in revenue generation. None of this is practiced in Georgia, where the market is considered too unstable. Gumbaridze gave examples: “Silknet and Caucasus Online, IP television stations, do not pay even a tetri [cent] to any television channels in Georgia while rebroadcasting the channels and generating revenues,” he said.

He also noted that advertising agencies facilitate development of Georgia’s advertising market. “The agencies have proficiency and expertise in media planning. They are far better prepared now than they used to be,” he said.

According to the panelists, Georgian banks do not offer any special loan packages for media outlets, because they refuse to admit that media is a special type of business. Therefore, banks provide only consumer loans to develop services or mortgage loans to purchase property. Kuprashvili said that Georgian banks think the media sector lacks sustainability, and is riskier than other businesses. “When we needed to purchase equipment, none of the banks gave our television companies a loan. The print media share the same fate,” Kuprashvili added.

The Media Development Loan Fund, sponsored by philanthropist George Soros, provided a loan to Batumelebi with a 2 percent annual rate. Tsetskhladze said that Batumelebi repaid the loan in mid-2015.

Government tenders are distributed unevenly, panelists said. For television channels, they are announced under a quota system, i.e. in line with their ratings. Almost the same amount of money is dispersed to Rustavi2 and Imedi TV, the two leading channels in the market. Tsetskhladze said that tenders are given to large media companies with bigger

audiences. “Companies like us [regional broadcasters] will never participate in such competitions,” said Kuprashvili.

In 2015 some solid steps were also taken towards improving existing practices of measuring online media. Advertising agencies purchased AdRiver, a system for managing and monitoring Internet advertising that enables targeted online sales and monitoring of advertising campaigns in Georgia. According to the panelists, TV MR GE also initiated the installation of online media measurement tools. These were very important initiatives toward developing the advertising market.

In terms of measuring audiences, however, practices did not advance any further compared with 2014. Only the television industry is measured by TV MR GE, a licensee of Nielsen that utilizes international measurement standards. Cable television, radio, online, and print media have to cope with not having such universal audience data. Panelists named this as a key reason behind the uneven distribution of advertising money among outlets.

Regional television stations face the same problem. “No agency measures audiences in regional media,” said Kuprashvili. TV MR GE works only in several big cities in the regions, leaving out some of the best-off provinces such as Kakheti, Samtskhe Javakheti, and Kvemo Kartli. These provinces have higher spending per head and could be attractive to potential advertisers, noted Kuprashvili.

Some online media outlets commonly use Google Analytics, which is not sufficient to speculate about the demographics of the websites or eventually affect sales volume. Advertisers’ lack of trust in the data that websites provide also affects sales decisions. “If there were international measurement agencies and targeted sales in the Internet market, [the market] would be three times bigger,” said Gumbaridze.

Market Intelligence Caucasus, the official licensee of TNS, has measured the radio audience in Georgia’s large and medium cities for three years using day-after-recall methodology. The research is funded by subscribing radio stations, advertising agencies, and USAID.

Limited official information is available on print media circulations. On its online portal geostat.ge, the National Statistics Office of Georgia reports 313 registered newspapers in the country, with a circulation of 60.4 million in 2015. However, no circulation data is available for individual publications.

In 2016, a new audience research agency, Tri Media Intelligence (TMI), a Kantar Media partner, entered the Georgian market. One of the agency founders is an editor of the newspaper *Kviris Palitra*, part of Palitra Media group,

which includes Palitra TV. TMI director Tsotne Mirtskhulava explained that the agency will offer a larger and more balanced research panel compared to TV MR GE, along with better technologies and measurement of more television channels. While Kuprashvili argued in favor of the TMI research panel, Gumbaridze expressed doubt that the entire population will be measured even with two agencies. Kuprashvili also pointed out, “TMI doesn’t have plans to measure regions properly, and only intends to set people meters in the same towns where TV MR GE is present.”

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Georgia Objective Score: 2.48

The score for this objective remained almost the same as last year. A handful of professional associations, together with civil society groups, work to promote the interests of individual journalists and media outlets, but not all of them are functioning, the panelists said.

“Some of the existing associations and unions failed to live up to their purpose,” said Ia Mamaladze, publisher of *Guria News*. The Georgian Press Association maintains a formal existence, and the Journalists’ Trade Union has never really managed to evolve.

The Media Advocacy Coalition unites media and rights groups including GYLA, GARB, GCJE, and Mediaclub. The coalition showed some success in 2015 in advocating for media interests, and has taken an active role in supporting

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.

Rustavi2 journalists. Still, according to Gela Mtvlishvili, the Georgian Association of Regional Broadcasters has by far remained the most active organization among those that are lobbying for media interests and are fundraising. "If not for this association, regional media would not be able to switch to digital broadcasting," said Dzvelishvili.

Free from political and government influences and commercial interests, GCJE has become more powerful in the past years, panelists said. The charter's work has gone beyond journalistic circles, raising the importance of ethical standards among the general public. "When politicians or public figures say something and they are disgruntled by the media's reaction, but defamation is absent, they go to the charter to complain," Tsimakuridze said. In 2015, GCJE launched the media portal mediachecker.ge, which analyzes flaws in television, radio, online, and print media. Dzvelishvili noted that mediachecker.ge raised the susceptibility of the Georgian media to ethical breaches.

Currently, CGJE has approximately 254 members both in the capital and in the regions, according to Zuriashvili, who chaired the organization in 2015. Throughout 2014, CGJE discussed and resolved 35 complaints.

In September 2015, The Ministry of Defense lodged a complaint through GCJE against several journalists and a producer at Rustavi2, on the charges of airing unverified news. One such news report was on the controversy surrounding the possible involvement of Georgian soldiers in the sexual assault of children in Central African Republic while serving as peacekeepers. A GCJE committee investigation revealed that original news reports were based only on interviews with local community members.

A gap remains in legal support for journalists, now that GYLA has closed down its Georgian Media Legal Defense Center due to donor funding running out. Panelists expressed concern that few organizations remain working on the protection of journalists' rights. Tsetskhladze recalled that when Netgazeti.ge sued TV Ertulovneba, the company affiliated with the Georgian orthodox patriarchy, for violating broadcast ethics, it was challenging for her outlet to handle the case. "The procedure was very difficult for us, with filing the lawsuit, preparing the legal documents, etc. We had to ask an independent media lawyer to help us," Tsetskhladze said.

Since these organizations rely on donor funding, their visibility wanes and thrives depending on the flow of funds. At the end of December 2015, GYLA announced the start of a new media project with funding from USAID through the East-West Management Institute's ACCESS project.

The project aims to investigate violations of journalists' rights, interference in the work of media outlets, and the government's reactions to such instances. GYLA's website states that it will only provide legal support for journalists and media outlets in special cases.

Andguladze said that even though the Council of Europe (CoE) is not a donor organization, it will support GCJE in 2016 through a EU/CoE joint project "Promoting Freedom, Professionalism and Pluralism of the Media." The council will also provide networking possibilities with similar organizations in the South Caucasus region and Eastern Europe. USAID continues to support media through the Media for Transparent and Accountable Governance program, whose Regional Media Sustainability Initiative aims to assist regional media outlets in their efforts to become profitable, viable businesses.

Georgia has more than 40 journalism programs offered at approximately 20 universities, but panelists said that they are somewhat out of touch with market needs. Panelists disagreed as to whether these schools offer hands-on training and quality education to its students. "Since we are assessing the overall situation, we cannot judge about the quality of the new graduates of affluent journalism schools," Mtvlishvili said. Narimanishvili agreed, adding that young journalists often lack basic skills. Maia Tabagari, a news producer at Imedi TV, claimed that innovative approaches implemented in some media schools with the help of donor organizations have yielded favorable outcomes. The Multimedia Education Center established and run by USAID and IREX serves students from journalism schools at the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs, Caucasus University, and other universities, and the Multimedia Center at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University has been functioning for several years now.

The panelists said that the type and level of training programs and workshops that foreign experts offer do not always correspond with the wishes of Georgian media professionals. "For example, the foreign trainers coming here teach us to register on Twitter," Tsetskhladze said. But needs-based training programs are also on rise; Dzvelishvili mentioned training course for journalists in health care policy funded by USAID and implemented by IREX.

Sometimes, the timing of the training programs is not ideal for Georgian journalists. Editors and journalists on the panel said that sometimes, even though they would want their new journalists to attend, they are not able to do so because of the lack of human resources. "If they all go to trainings, we must stop working," Tsetskhladze explained.

Most printing houses are owned privately, and the printing industry is free from government interference. But publishing quality suffers drastically, and panelists named this as the most damaging factor to the print media. "There are very few publishing houses that print newspapers at all, and even fewer that print on a quality level," said Nestan Tsetskhladze, noting that she was utterly disappointed with the experience she had with printing *Kviris Palitra*. "The color and text was difficult to read," she said. Some newspapers, like *Netgazeti*, refuse to use the services provided by controversial tabloid *Asaval Dasavali*. "I know it is business, but for me, it is a question of principle and matter of values," explained Tsetskhladze. High prices on printing is another problem in Georgia.

Channels of media distribution (including cable, television towers, and multiplexes) are apolitical and not monopolized. But Kuprashvili said that Channel 25 in Batumi faced impediments with installing digital equipment on the television tower in Adjara, which made her believe that political interests were involved. For three months, Channel 25 tried to obtain permission from Adjara Public Broadcaster and the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, which owns the land where the tower is located.

At the end of November, a Georgian pro-Islamic State group released video footage of four Georgian-speaking men calling on Muslims in the country to join the "caliphate" and threatening to execute "infidels," *civil.ge* reported. As a result, state security services blocked access to two websites, among them WordPress, while both remained available outside the country. Even though the service was restored in a few hours, the panelists unanimously condemned the state's decision. The panelists were concerned that the security services overreached in this situation. Tsetskhladze said, "We have no information on how [the security services] accomplished this from a technical perspective—whether they had a relevant document from the court, or if they addressed a provider. Can they simply make a call and cut off access? In this case, this seems to be a real threat."

Kuprashvili added that in the wake of this incident, media members are noting the vagueness of the Internet regulations, allowing multiple interpretations. "Our legislative acts [the Law on Electronic Communication] obligate a network provider to monitor the .ge domain and revoke forbidden content. Such content can encompass anything, and it is unclear what the term means. The mistake in the case of WordPress, or whatever it might be called, has made us think about the problems with legislation."

List of Panel Participants

Nino Danelia, journalism professor, Ilia State University; Independent Media Expert, Tbilisi

Nino Jangirashvili, director, TV Kavkasia, Tbilisi

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

Ia Mamaladze, publisher, *Guria News*, Chokhatauri

Maia Tabagari, director, Imedi TV news service, Tbilisi

Zura Gumbaridze, executive director, Sales Department, Rustavi2, Tbilisi

Nino Narimanishvili, editor, *Samkhretis Karibche*, Akhaltsikhe

Gela Mtvlishvili, director, Kakheti Information Center, Gurjaani

Ekaterine Tsimakuridze, coordinator, Georgian Young Lawyers Association, Tbilisi

Mamuka Andguladze, project officer, Council of Europe, Tbilisi

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

Nestan Tsetskhladze, editor, *Netgazeti.ge*, Tbilisi

Nata Dzvelishvili, Executive Director, Ethics Charter of Georgian Journalists, Tbilisi

Nino Zuriashvili, investigative reporter, Studio Monitor, Tbilisi

Zura Vardiashvili, editor, *Liberali*, Tbilisi

Zviad Koridze, independent media expert, Tbilisi

Moderator

Ekaterina Basilaia, Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi

Authors

Ekaterina Basilaia, Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi

Nino Makhviladze, Georgian Institute of Public Affairs, Tbilisi

The panel discussion was convened on December 5, 2015.

Despite these developments, panelists mostly agreed that the quality of broadcast media had improved from previous years and government interference, while still present, has diminished somewhat.



GEORGIA

Ahead of the parliamentary elections in 2016, several developments in broadcast media have raised concerns that the ruling Georgia Dream Coalition is trying to establish control over the media. Human Rights activist and head of the Georgian Young Lawyers Association Ana Natsvlshvili highlighted the ongoing ownership battle over Rustavi 2 (one of Georgia's most watched private television channels), disputes in Maestro TV (third most watched channel), and the cancellation of several political talk shows as indicators that broadcasters' rights are under duress.

This is not the first time ownership battles over media outlets have dominated the news. In 2007, Imedi TV, then one of the few channels critical of former President Saakashvili's government, had suffered a similar fate. Imedi TV was owned by Badri Patarkatsishvili, a supporter turned opponent of Saakashvili. Following the coverage of the anti-government protests, the channel lost its license to broadcast, had its assets frozen, and Patarkatsishvili was accused of using the channel to incite a revolution. For several years to follow, the editorial policy of the channel was believed to be controlled by the Saakashvili government until its collapse in 2012.

Most popular television channels in Georgia over the last few years have witnessed sudden changes in management and editorial policy. In almost every instance, political or government interference has been blamed. Curiously, since 2012 there has been greater transparency on media ownership and a reduction of political patronage. Panelists claim that despite these changes, the media in Georgia continue to be polarized, and to some extent influenced by political parties they support.

Despite these developments, panelists mostly agreed that the quality of broadcast media had improved from previous years and government interference, while still present, has diminished somewhat. Panelists came up with a few recommendations to help the media better serve public needs:

- Broadcasters need to invest in codes of conducts and setting standards of reporting;
- Media literacy for citizens is essential, therefore training courses need to be designed, developed, and funded by both the public and private sector;
- Qualified personnel must be developed to report on issues requiring specialized knowledge, such as business, law etc.;
- Georgian journalists should seek educational opportunities outside the country to learn from different media environments;
- More efforts need to be made to ensure media independence from political or government interests.

Objective 6 is a separate study from objectives 1 through 5 of the Media Sustainability Index. This objective is measured using a separate group of panelists (listed at the end of this section) and unique indicators (described at the end of this section).

OBJECTIVE 6: SERVING PUBLIC NEEDS

Georgia Objective Score: 1.91

In November 2015, the Tbilisi City Court called for the appointment of interim managers at Rustavi 2, Georgia's most popular private television channels. Reports suggest that the judge also asked the temporary managers to make changes to the editorial policy, including covering "all issues representing public interest." Rustavi 2 has been locked in an ownership struggle with the former owner, Kibar Khalvashi, claiming he was pressured to give up his shares by then-President Saakashvili. Khalvashi took the current owners to court, seeking the return of his shares. Panelists agreed that despite the ongoing court battle, Rustavi 2—a channel known for being critical of the current government—remained the best source for broadcast news.

There was unanimous agreement among panelists that the media are not responsive to citizens' information needs; instead they focus on content that receives the highest ratings. Giorgi Vekua, director of the International Relations Department of the Georgian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, claimed it was the lack of professional training for journalists and polarized reporting that has led to the current problems. "Journalists are not well qualified and it's

THE MEDIA SERVE CITIZENS BY PROVIDING USEFUL AND RELEVANT NEWS AND INFORMATION AND FACILITATING PUBLIC DEBATE

- > The media promote and facilitate inclusive discussions about local, national, and international issues (social, political, economic, etc.) that are important to citizens.
- > Reporting and discussion in the media support democratic policymaking, government transparency, equitable regulatory enforcement, and consumer protection.
- > News and information provided by the media is relevant to, and informs, the choices and decisions (social, political, economic, etc.) made by citizens.
- > Citizens trust that news and information reported by the media accurately reflects reality.
- > It is possible for citizens to recognize partisan, editorial, or advertorial content as such.
- > Editorial and partisan media content is a constructive part of national dialogue; media refrain from including "hate speech" content.
- > The media expose citizens to multiple viewpoints and experiences of citizens from various social, political, regional, gender, ethnic, religious, confessional, etc., groups.

pretty hard to find the professional ones when needed. They also have a bias or are affiliated with political parties or certain ideologies." In order to get the full story, Vekua said, "In the evening we can watch Rustavi 2 and get the one side of story, then watch Maestro get their side of the same story and then make our final and neutral conclusion."

The panelists did not note many instances where the media promoted discussions, especially around local social issues. Ninutsa Gulashvili, a member of Junior Chamber International, a youth focused non-profit, said there is a lack of programming for young students and children. Part of the problem, she claims, is that the media is disinterested in youth activities and opinions, and as a result, there is no space for them. According to her, "Putting some educational or interactive student TV projects in broadcast media," was needed, especially to motivate young people and keep them engaged.

Panelist Nata Kvachantiradze, chairperson of the Georgian Tourism Association, spoke of the impact the media has on tourism in the country. "Earlier, one could easily find broadcasts about places to visit in Georgia, unfortunately, now media only focus on tourism in other countries. There has been an increase in shows about Europe and Asia, while the heritage of Georgia is largely ignored." For Shota Lagazidze, CEO of the Agri-Tourism Farms Association, coverage of agrarian issues has declined, which is unfortunate as "programs focused on rural life, tourism, and culture are essential, particularly because they have a significant impact on the economy."

A large percentage of Georgian households have a television, and perhaps that explains why the brunt of the criticism by the panelists focused on television media. According to panelists, the lack of media interest and focus on these issues is a result of a lack of professionalism and the intense focus on ratings. By focusing on ratings, according to Vekua, "The focus is on stories that most people will watch, not those that people actually need."

According to Davit Jaiani, a lecturer on human rights at the East European University, "Georgia is a place where a good journalist is the one who shouts louder than others. They need to get educated."

Panelists said that a lack of professional training could explain why the media do not effectively contribute to democratic policymaking. In fact, panelists observed instances where the media coverage of the European Union-Georgia Association Agreement, which outlines the cooperation between the two entities, is poor.

Panelist Tamta Muradashvili, a lawyer, claims there have been efforts by politicians and some media to spread misinformation about this agreement. For instance, in 2015 there were amendments to advertising regulations, limiting advertising time to 12 minutes per hour of broadcast from April 1, 2015. Several media outlets had been opposed to this move, in part because their revenue would be affected. They would have preferred to delay the legislation by a year and dilute some of the amendments. When the law was adopted these outlets broadcast comments by politicians claiming the changes to the law were the result of pressure from the EU, and Georgia was being forced to adhere to the agreement. If the media were intent on objective reporting, Muradashvili said, they would have found that “the EU has no such regulations,” saying, “They should read these agreements carefully and report on them.”

Panelists did not agree on the reasons behind the poor quality of reporting, whether it is a result of disinterest in the subject or deliberate manipulation of information; it is unclear. They did note that not all of the media exhibit bias against the agreement. Some broadcasters, like Rustavi 2, do try and explain the EU regulations and their impact on the society.

In discussing the impact of media on citizen choices, panelists largely agreed that the media in Georgia is rarely neutral and the information is often unverified. The primary goal of the media seems to be providing news that sells instead of news that informs citizens. Zaur Khalilov, executive director of the Civil Integration Fund, an NGO that focuses on minority rights, added, “The owners of media companies say that they need scandals in order to increase sales and journalists do not have any other recourse.”

According to Levan Giorgadze, chairperson of the Free Market Advocacy Organization, business journalists often “provided unverified information for beneficiaries.” This is particularly worrying given that people often depend on business channels to make financial decisions. According to panelists, the problem also affects the image of the media and its ability to effectively cover complex issues. Reporting on an insolvency case that came up in the Tbilisi City Court, journalists reported on the proceedings and reached conclusions before the judge had even announced the verdict, making most of what they said invalid. This, according to panelists, was “another way to get people’s attention.” Journalists also misreported the case, calling it bankruptcy, when it was an insolvency case.

Giorgadze concluded that it was important for the media to recognize that “It is not an instrument for public relations; instead, its job is to provide truthful information.” He

By focusing on ratings, according to Vekua, “The focus is on stories that most people will watch, not those that people actually need.”

added, “Journalists should at least be well informed about the sector and the person who they intend to interview.” Other panelists agreed, saying the media is obliged to give people the information they need, not the information the media are interested in relaying. It is in the media’s interest to draw attention to more significant issues than just politics and parliament.

Panelists criticized the inaccuracies in media content. Writer Taniel Namoradze gave an example: “There was a case when journalists interviewed an astrologer, doctor, and film director about a big worker’s strike in Georgia. They didn’t interview people actually connected to the strike!”

The incident the panelist mentioned was a strike organized by coal workers in Tkibuli and glass factory workers in Ksani. The striking workers demanded wage increases and improved health and safety measures. These workers, with support from metal workers and those employed in the chemical industry, carried out an effective campaign, forcing their employers to meet their demands. The point the panelist emphasized was that often, “talking heads” on television have nothing to do with the story, but instead are chosen only to draw viewers.

Given this context, panelists agreed that it is hard to trust the media. Namoradze also highlighted the partisan nature of media reports as a challenge that needs to be overcome. “Biased content is the ‘ugly truth’ of our media system,” he said. He claimed it was common knowledge that “All media sources represent the interests of different political parties, groups, or the government.” Panelists agreed that the media do not accurately reflect reality; instead, they publish their own version of stories. Khalilov remarked, “If someone commits a crime, instead of pointing out the illegality, the media is mostly likely to use the opportunity to broadcast an exclusive story about the crime.”

When discussing Indicator 5, whether the public can recognize partisan or advertorial media content as such, panelists believe most journalists are not properly qualified and often unprofessional in presenting this information. Namoradze claimed, however, “Society knows and they are already aware of which broadcaster gives what type of information.”

In discussing the gender discourse in Georgia, Tsopurashvili, who is also a women's rights activist, said that the media use and popularize a lot of existing stereotypes. "Despite having many examples both inside and outside Georgia about women who are in positions of power," the media's portrayal of women seems to be skewed.

Panelists also pointed out that media consumers come in different types. For example, taxi drivers would be more likely to listen to the news or talk shows on radio. Those who work primarily in offices are more likely to consume online news and rely on social media for the news.

Tamar Tsopurashvili, a professor at Ilia State University, talked of the popularity of social media such as Facebook, which have become the most useful instruments for getting information. This popularity is helped in part by the mainstream media's inability to report neutrally. She added, "Almost none of the TV programs are balanced. Even soap operas don't have the level of information required. In Georgia, soap operas have a huge influence over society," implying that the media have a responsibility to maintain a certain quality of content. Talking of their content, she said, "For the last several years Indian and Turkish soap operas have gained popularity in the media. Society watches them and gets used to their lifestyle. Often, the values don't match with those in Georgia. Ethical standards must be maintained." Commenting on the quality of programming, she said, "One must not have to take off their clothes to become famous."

Panelists believe the problem lies not with the citizens but the media. Giorgadze pointed out that the media "broadcast information for some people's interests, not most people's

needs." He also believes that most journalists are not qualified for the positions they occupy.

Indicator 6, covering the role played by editorial and partisan content—and the avoidance of hate speech—received the lowest score from the panelists, most likely due to the dissatisfaction over professionalism in the media. Mari Korinteli, who runs a small business called Books in Batumi, said, "Rural broadcasters are more likely to speak about the problems facing society than those in capital." According to her, "The Regional Public Broadcaster in Batumi is more likely to broadcast interactive TV programs than most others. The private broadcaster on the other hand, they have limited viewership and scrutiny and, as a result, journalists often use hate speech."

According to the panelists, the main problem is that journalists have not received professional training. They believe it is the media's responsibility to practice ethical journalism, abstain from using hate speech, and conduct themselves properly and respectfully. The media cannot continue to believe that the end justifies the means.

Gigla Mikautadze, director of the Taxpayers Union, added "Nobody is interested in investing in systematic changes in the media sector. They are focused on watchdog type activities." According to the panelist, "Media has the opportunity to create and inform citizen's attitudes towards issues that matter. This attitude is essential, even for the government, since they want voters to elect them to power. It is society that rules the government, not vice versa." Given the high level of responsibility on the media, he believes everyone has a stake in better media quality in Georgia.

Some panelists noted that there has been some progress in the quality of media. But there is room for improvement, for both citizens and the media. For the media, there needs to be additional training courses, and that both the public and private sector have a stake in investing in this. For consumers of media, they believe, there need to be changes in the civic education system. Panelists suggested encouraging producers who make educational television programs to invest resources in making media more useful to society.

Panelist Korinteli, who works in Batumi (the center of the Adjara Autonomous Republic), observed, “A large percentage of minorities do not use Georgian broadcasters because they give people information from the capital only. The media is not interested what is going outside the capital until something special happens, something that will generate mass interest and get high ratings.” Khalilov, who works on minority issues, shared an anecdote, claiming, “1TV channel openly admits it works on the basis of ratings. Their own board members don’t watch the channel.”

In the autonomous republic of Abkhazia, panelists noted, mainstream media is almost non-existent. Jaiani, who is an internally displaced person from Abkhazia, said “One living in Tbilisi can speak with us in the Abkhazian language, but in several years Abkhazians won’t be able to say something in Georgian—not even in Abkhazian—because of Russia’s influence there, and the media could play one of the most powerful roles in this field.”

He emphasized that there is an urgent need for television programs focused on Abkhazia and media outlets based out of the autonomous region. Russia’s influence in the region is growing, evidenced by the fact that “The National language is Abkhazian, but, unfortunately because of Russia’s huge influence and interference no media representatives broadcast anything in that language.” According to Jaiani, the absence of any media coverage in the local language poses a threat to the large internally displaced populations. “We do not have any kind of information on what is actually happening in Abkhazia today.”

In discussing the gender discourse in Georgia, Tsopurashvili, who is also a women’s rights activist, said that the media use and popularize a lot of existing stereotypes. “Despite having many examples both inside and outside Georgia about women who are in positions of power,” the media’s portrayal of women seems to be skewed. When reporting on women in government, the media often use unnecessary adjectives like “blonde woman” or “pretty woman.” This, according to Tsopurashvili, shows that the media and society see women as “as unequal objects,” which in turn may encourage discrimination and perpetuate misunderstandings about women and gender roles in society.

List of Panel Participants

Ana Natsvlishvili, chairwoman, Georgian Young Lawyers Association, Tbilisi

Giorgi Vekua, director, International Relations Department, Georgian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Tbilisi

Levan Giorgadze, chairperson, Free Market Advocacy Organization, Tbilisi

Tamta Muradashvili, lawyer, Tbilisi

Tamar Tsopurashvili, professor, Ilia State University, Tbilisi

Tariel Namoradze, writer, Tbilisi

Mari Korinteli, founder and CEO, Books in Batumi, Batumi

Ninutsa Gulashvili, member, Junior Chamber International, Tbilisi

Davit Jaiani, lecturer, East European University, Gali

Zaur Khalilov, executive director, Civil Integration Fund, Tbilisi

Shota Lagazidze, founder and CEO, Agri-Tourism Farms Association, Alvani

Nata Kvachantiradze, chairperson, Georgian Tourism Association, Tbilisi

Gigla Mikautadze, director, Taxpayers Union, Tbilisi

Moderator & Author

Ketevan Buadze, Georgian Lawyers for Independent Profession, Tbilisi

Giorgi Glunchadze, project manager, Georgian Lawyers for Independent Profession, Tbilisi

The panel discussion was convened on March 5, 2016.

Giorgadze concluded that it was important for the media to recognize that “It is not an instrument for public relations; instead, its job is to provide truthful information.”



GEORGIA

To complete both studies, IREX used closely related, albeit slightly different methodologies. The Methodology for Objective 1 through 5 are explained in detail, followed by a summary of modifications made for the Objective 6 study.

Methodology for Objectives 1 through 5

IREX prepared the MSI in cooperation with USAID as a tool to assess the development of media systems over time and across countries. IREX staff, USAID, and other media-development professionals contributed to the development of this assessment tool.

The MSI assesses five “objectives” in shaping a successful media system:

1. Legal and social norms protect and promote free speech and access to public information.
2. Journalism meets professional standards of quality.
3. Multiple news sources provide citizens with reliable, objective news.
4. Media are well-managed enterprises, allowing editorial independence.
5. Supporting institutions function in the professional interests of independent media.

These objectives were judged to be the most important aspects of a sustainable and professional independent media system, and serve as the criteria against which countries are rated. A score is attained for each objective by rating between seven and nine indicators, which determine how well a country meets that objective. The objectives, indicators, and scoring system are presented below.

Scoring: A Local Perspective

The primary source of information is a panel of local experts that IREX assembles in each country to serve as panelists. These experts are drawn from the country’s media outlets, NGOs, professional associations, and academic institutions. Panelists may be editors, reporters, media managers or owners, advertising and marketing specialists, lawyers, professors or teachers, or human rights observers. Additionally, panels comprise the various types of media represented in a country. The panels also include representatives from the capital city and other geographic regions, and they reflect gender, ethnic, and religious diversity as appropriate. For consistency from year to year, at least half of the previous year’s participants are included on the following year’s panel. IREX identifies and works with a local or regional organization or individual to oversee the process.

The scoring is completed in two parts. First, panel participants are provided with a questionnaire and explanations of the indicators and scoring system. Descriptions of each indicator clarify their meanings and help organize the panelist’s thoughts. For example, the questionnaire asks the panelist to consider not only the letter of the legal framework, but its practical implementation, too. A country without a formal freedom-of-information law that enjoys customary government openness may well outperform a country that has a strong law on the books that is frequently ignored. Furthermore, the questionnaire does not single out any one type of media as more important than another; rather it directs the panelist to consider the salient types of media and to determine if an underrepresentation, if applicable, of one media type impacts the sustainability of the media sector as a whole. In this way, we capture the

influence of public, private, national, local, community, and new media. Each panelist reviews the questionnaire individually and scores each indicator.

The panelists then assemble to analyze and discuss the objectives and indicators. While panelists may choose to change their scores based upon discussions, IREX does not promote consensus on scores among panelists. The panel moderator (in most cases a representative of the host-country institutional partner or a local individual) prepares a written analysis of the discussion, which IREX staff members edit subsequently. Names of the individual panelists and the partner organization or individual appear at the end of each country chapter.

IREX editorial staff members review the panelists' scores, and then provide a set of scores for the country, independently of the panel. This score carries the same weight as an individual panelist. The average of all individual indicator scores within the objective determines the objective score. The overall country score is an average of all five objectives.

In some cases where conditions on the ground are such that panelists might suffer legal retribution or physical threats as a result of their participation, IREX will opt to allow some or all of the panelists and the moderator/author to remain anonymous. In severe situations, IREX does not engage panelists as such; rather the study is conducted through research and interviews with those knowledgeable of the media situation in that country. Such cases are appropriately noted in relevant chapters.

I. Objectives and Indicators

Objective 1

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.

Objective 2

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).

Objective 3

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.

Objective 4

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.

Objective 5

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.

II. Scoring System

A. Indicator Scoring

Each indicator is scored using the following system:

- 0** = Country does not meet the indicator; government or social forces may actively oppose its implementation.
- 1** = Country minimally meets aspects of the indicator; forces may not actively oppose its implementation, but business environment may not support it and government or profession do not fully and actively support change.
- 2** = Country has begun to meet many aspects of the indicator, but progress may be too recent to judge or still dependent on current government or political forces.
- 3** = Country meets most aspects of the indicator; implementation of the indicator has occurred over several years and/or through changes in government, indicating likely sustainability.
- 4** = Country meets the aspects of the indicator; implementation has remained intact over multiple changes in government, economic fluctuations, changes in public opinion, and/or changing social conventions.

B. Objective and Overall Scoring

The average scores of all the indicators are averaged to obtain a single, overall score for each objective. Objective scores are averaged to provide an overall score for the country. IREX interprets the overall scores as follows:

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.

Methodology for Objective 6

The purpose of this separate but related study is to rate the extent to which the traditional media (such as newspapers and broadcasters) and new media (blogs and other online or mobile formats) capture citizen concerns in a non-partisan manner. The study also assesses the media's ability to serve as a facilitator of public debate and as an outlet for citizen voices. It measures the capacity of media to hold politicians, business, and other actors accountable.

To accomplish this, IREX developed a methodology similar to its original MSI, described above, so that the results can seamlessly accompany the MSI's five objectives, which measure the performance of a country's media sector. This study uses the same process of scoring, enlisting local participants to answer an IREX questionnaire, and holding a panel discussion moderated by a local partner. Hence, we refer to this study as the Media Sustainability Index's "Objective 6."

Like the original five objectives of the MSI, this study relies on a stated objective and several supporting indicators. Objective 6 and its indicators are stated in such a way that panelists can use them as a model against which to evaluate their current news and information environment. This allows for meaningful comparisons, as well as setting forth expectations for future development. The objective and indicators are listed in the table below.

Objective 6

THE MEDIA SERVE CITIZENS BY PROVIDING USEFUL AND RELEVANT NEWS AND INFORMATION AND FACILITATING PUBLIC DEBATE

- > The media promote and facilitate inclusive discussions about local, national, and international issues (social, political, economic, etc.) that are important to citizens.
- > Reporting and discussion in the media support democratic policymaking, government transparency, equitable regulatory enforcement, and consumer protection.
- > News and information provided by the media is relevant to, and informs, the choices and decisions (social, political, economic, etc.) made by citizens.
- > Citizens trust that news and information reported by the media accurately reflects reality.
- > It is possible for citizens to recognize partisan, editorial, or advertorial content as such.
- > Editorial and partisan media content is a constructive part of national dialogue; media refrain from including "hate speech" content.
- > The media expose citizens to multiple viewpoints and experiences of citizens from various social, political, regional, gender, ethnic, religious, confessional, etc., groups.

The process of undertaking the study is the same as above, with the following modifications:

- **A distinct set of panelists.** For Objective 6, panelists might be academics, student leaders, bloggers, media analysts, human rights and other NGO leaders, business association leaders/members, or trade union leaders/members. Consistent with the original MSI methodology, panelists represent the diversity within a society, and are selected in terms of gender balance, residence in the capital city and more rural areas, and membership in various political or other factions.
- **Modified score definitions and interpretation of final score.** Guidance on how to score each indicator and definitions of the meaning of scores are unique to this objective. These are detailed below.

As above, panelists are directed to score each indicator from 0 to 4, using whole or half points. They are provided with the following guidance:

-
- 0** = No, the media in my country do not meet the provisions of this indicator; it is impossible or exceedingly rare to find content in any media outlet that meets the provisions of this indicator.
- 1** = The media in my country minimally meet the aspects of this indicator. Occasionally, a media outlet produces content that meets the aspects of this indicator. Or, citizens in my country may sometimes obtain news and information that meet the aspects of this indicator, but only by referring to several sources and comparing reports on their own.
- 2** = The media in my country have begun to meet many aspects of this indicator. There are at least a few media outlets that frequently produce content that meets the aspects of this indicator. However, progress may still be dependent on current political forces or media ownership/editors.
- 3** = The media in my country meet most aspects of this indicator. Many media outlets strive to, and regularly produce, content that meet the aspects of this indicator. Adherence to this indicator has occurred over several years and/or changes in government, indicating likely sustainability.
- 4** = Yes, the media in my country meets the aspects of this indicator. Media outlets and the public expect content to meet the aspects of this indicator. Exceptions to this are recognized as either substandard journalism or non-journalistic content (e.g., labeled and recognized as opinion or advertorial). Adherence to this indicator has remained intact over multiple changes in government, economic fluctuations, changes in public opinion, and/or differing social conventions.

The overall score for the objective is interpreted to mean the following:

Unsustainable (0-1): Country's media sector does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Media content is contrary to citizens' information needs, media seek primarily to serve political or other forces, and professionalism is low.

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2): Country's media sector minimally meets objectives, with significant segments of the media sector beholden to political or other forces. Evident progress developing media that serve citizens information needs and increased professionalism may be too recent to judge sustainability.

Near Sustainability (2-3): Country's media sector has progressed in meeting multiple indicators, and many media outlets consistently strive to and succeed in serving citizens' information needs with objective, timely, and useful content. Achievements have survived changes in government; however, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism is sustainable.

Sustainable (3-4): Country's media sector is considered generally professional; serving citizen information needs with objective, timely, and useful content; and facilitating public debate. A primary goal of most media outlets and media professionals is to serve such ends, and similarly, the public expects this from the media sector. Achievements have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.