

GEORGIA



MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2018

Tracking Development
of Sustainable
Independent Media
Around the World



GEORGIA

AT A GLANCE

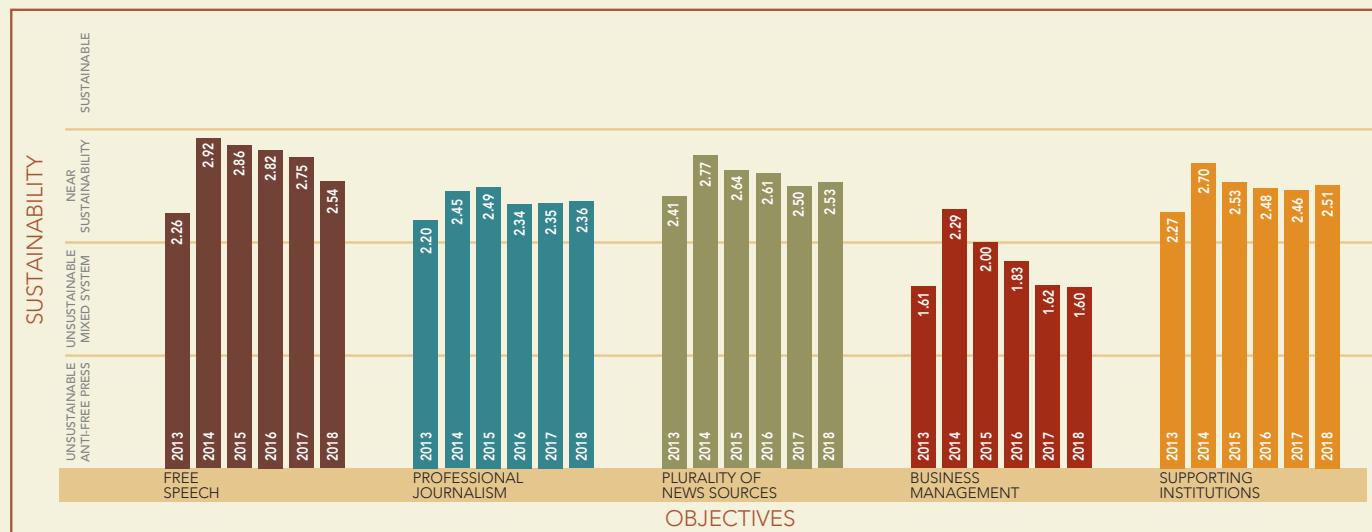
GENERAL

- **Population:** 4,926,330 mln (CIA World Factbook, July 2017 est.)
- **Capital city:** Tbilisi
- **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Georgian 86.8%, Azeri 6.3%, Armenian 4.5%, other 2.3% (CIA World Factbook, 2014)
- **Religion (% of population):** Orthodox Christian 83.4%, Muslim 10.7%, Armenian-Apostolic 2.9%, other 1.2%, none 0.5% (CIA World Factbook, 2014)
- **Languages (% of population):** Georgian (official) 87.6%, Azeri 6.2%, Armenian 3.9%, Russian 1.2%, other 1% (CIA World Factbook, 2014est.)
- **GNI (2016-Atlas):** \$ 14,259.35 million (World Bank Development Indicators, 2016)
- **GNI per capita (2016-PPP):** \$ 9,530 (World Bank, International Comparison Program database, 2016)
- **Literacy rate:** 99.8% (male 99.8%, female 99.7 %) (2015est. CIA World Factbook)
- **President or top authority:** President Giorgi Margvelashvili (since October 27, 2013)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- **Number of print outlets, radio stations, television stations nationwide:** Print: 317 newspapers (National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2017); Broadcast: 91 active radio broadcasting licenses, 30 Multiplex operators, 111 TV broadcasters with different types of authorizations (one and the same company owns several authorizations), 6 radio broadcasters with authorization. (Georgian National Communications Registry, accessed in December, 2017)
- **Newspaper circulation statistics (total circulation and largest paper):** Rezonanse (4,000–5,000 daily), Kviris Palitra (average 55,000 weekly) (individual newspaper claims)
- **Broadcast ratings:** Highest rated television outlets in the country: Rustavi2, 4.63%; Imedi, 4.91%; GDS, 1.06%, Comedy Channel 0.74%; Chanel 1 0.64% (TV MR GE, 2017)
- **Annual advertising revenue in the media sector:** The estimated revenue of the television advertising market in 2017 reached GEL 70 million (approximately \$28 mln); (TV MR GE, 2017)
- **News agencies:** AP Bureau, Reuters Bureau, Agence France Presse (representatives), Bloomberg (local representative), info 9, Black Sea Press, Iveroni, NovostiGruzia, Sarke, Interpressnews, Iprinda, 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, agenda.ge, Aianews.ge, Kakheti Information Center, Primetimenews.ge, Kvemo Kartli Information Center, Mtkheta-Tianeti Information Center, For.ge, Frontnews.ge, Civil.ge, Economic.ge, marshalpres.ge, bpi.ge
- **Internet subscribers:** 733,691 (Georgian National Communications Commission, December, 2017)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: GEORGIA



SCORE KEY

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.



Business management remained the weakest element of Georgia's media landscape in a year that saw consolidation of the advertising market, mergers of pro-government channels, and the crisis at Rustavi 2, which was punctuated by the defection of several highly rated programs. With their financial viability at risk, major broadcasters, for the first time, sought income from cable carriers for transmitting their shows, challenging the "must carry, must offer" principle in Georgian law. The depth of the industry's problems remains unclear, as the GNCC did not release revenue figures for major stations. All the above contributed to the panel's outlook on the state of Georgian media, dropping the country's score from 2.34 to 2.31.

For Georgian media, 2017 was a vexing year. Trends that took hold the previous year—including politicization of media and shrinking advertising revenue—tightened their grip on the television stations that provide most Georgians with most of their news. The main, putatively independent state media bodies, the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) and the Georgia National Communications Commission (GNCC), showed worrying signs of becoming overtly political actors.

The GPB started the year with a newly elected director. The main public broadcaster undertook a series of changes that included: dropping critically acclaimed social and political talk shows; bringing in journalists from Georgian Dream Studio (GDS), the television company formerly owned by the family of billionaire businessman and former Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili; and relegating minority-language programming to its website. Off the air, GPB backed amendments to the Law on Broadcasting that broaden its access to advertisers and loosen restrictions on its acquisition of programming. The measures potentially position the GPB to

compete with commercial media for shows and dwindling ad revenues.

The GNCC sought expanded authority in the areas of media literacy, hate speech, and opinion polls, moves that panel members called thinly veiled efforts to impose more government control over independent media. There was turmoil for major private broadcasters, as the long-running and highly politicized legal fight over ownership of Rustavi 2, the top-rated channel, went to the European Court of Human Rights and the station's finances nosedived.

Afgan Mukhtarli, an Azerbaijani investigative reporter who went into exile in Georgia to escape his home country's clampdown on media critical of its government, was snatched off the street in Tbilisi and transported to Baku, where he is being held on questionable criminal charges. His abduction sparked an outcry from civil society and mainstream Georgian journalists, who took part in public and on-air protests to express solidarity with Mukhtarli and to challenge government denials of complicity in his abduction.

**OBJECTIVE 1:
FREEDOM OF
SPEECH**

2.54

The score for this objective declined by 0.21 point amid what panelists characterized as government attempts to impose mechanisms for greater media control. Upheaval at GPB; ownership and content controversies at Rustavi 2, the largest broadcast network and a thorn in the Georgian Dream government's side; and Mukhtarli's abduction and return to Azerbaijan were also cited as causes for concern.

Georgia's legislation guaranteeing free expression and freedom of the press remains among the strongest in the region, and a new constitution drafted in 2017 and awaiting adoption would enshrine Internet access as a constitutional right. However, Zviad Koridze, an independent media expert, said proposed legislative amendments are chipping away at those protections. "They are aimed at cultivating the idea in society that media self-regulation can be restricted, that the media need to be regulated more," he noted.

In October 2017, GNCC submitted to the parliament three amendments to the Law on Broadcasting that panelists viewed as an expansion of the regulator's authority. One amendment would centralize a diffuse effort to improve Georgians' media literacy—currently involving school programs and self-regulation by broadcasters—under the authority of GNCC, which would establish a media-literacy strategy and create a nonprofit agency to implement it. The second proposed amendment would obligate broadcasters "to verify the trustworthiness and objectivity of opinion polls" in pre-election periods. It follows what a Media Development Foundation (MDF) report termed

the GNCC's "selective and inconsistent approach" to sanctioning outlets over polls published in the run-up to Georgia's 2016 national elections, with broadcasters critical of the government facing heavier penalties. Tamar Kintsurashvili, the director of MDF, said the rule on polling could give GNCC control over "not only the broadcasters, but research organizations as well." The Georgia chapter of Transparency International (TI) criticized the amendment, saying it could dampen public participation in opinion polls by arousing suspicions "that the regulator might learn about the positions expressed by the participants of the survey and their stated support for political parties."

The final proposed amendment would, under the umbrella of harmonizing Georgian law with European Union directives, expand the GNCC's authority to regulate broadcasters' professional and ethical standards in areas such as hate speech and discrimination, matters media currently self-regulate by means of codes of conduct. Nino Jangirashvili, director of regional broadcaster Kavkasia TV, said the vague legal definition of hate speech could give the GNCC, with its pro-government leanings, cover to sanction critical outlets such as Rustavi 2. Nata Dzvelishvili, executive director of the Georgian Charter of Journalism Ethics (GCJE), agreed: "Hate speech is so subjective that this amendment can be used subjectively against any media." She added, "GNCC's latest actions demonstrate that the commission has been gradually departing from its essence, which is an independent regulatory body."

The GNCC also drew fire from panelists for what they called protracted procedures and vague, poorly explained decisions on granting radio licenses. Natia Kuprashvili, director of the newly formed Alliance of Broadcasters (AB) and a professor at Tbilisi State University, cited the regulator's rejection of licenses for Iomurghalo Radio

in Kakheti and Mountain Radio in Mtskheta-Mtianeti, ostensibly due to a shortage of frequencies. In another case, she said the GNCC denied frequencies to Radio Palitra and Radio Hereti in the first round of applications, saying they were both so good the commission could not make up its mind. "Wherever we have licensing, we have vague and badly justified decisions or artificially prolonged procedures," Kuprashvili said.

There was contention and controversy throughout the year about the GPB's trajectory under its new director general, Vasil Maglaperidze, a former lawmaker and governor who previously

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 of broadcast media is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- ▶ Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- ▶ Crimes against journalists or media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- ▶ State or public media do not receive preferential legal treatment, and law guarantees editorial independence.
- ▶ 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 accessible; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- ▶ Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- ▶ Entry into the journalism profession is free, and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

worked at GDS, the television station owned by Bidzina Ivanishvili's family. Maglaperidze's affiliation with the ruling party created apprehension in civil society when he was elected by the public broadcaster's board in January, said Hatia Jinjikhadze, media-support program manager at the Open Society Georgia Foundation (OSGF). "What has happened since his arrival has validated our suspicions," she added.

Panel members echoed civil society groups in condemning reforms the GPB undertook throughout the year. In February, Maglaperidze announced plans to suspend 102 programs and air only newscasts until 2018, writing in an action plan that "radical steps" were needed to avert a "crisis" at the station and continue to justify its public funding, but the GPB board rejected the initiative. In June, the broadcaster dropped two programs produced by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's (RFE/RL) Georgian service: Red Zone, which aired on GPB for almost 10 years, and InterVIEW, a talk show known for tough questioning of politicians and public officials. They are now carried by another public channel, Adjara TV.

GPB has also recruited current and former GDS employees, among them hosts from 2030, a talk show launched by Bidzina Ivanishvili. In October, GPB awarded an equipment-rental contract worth more than GEL 372,000 (Georgian lari, the rough equivalent of \$146,400) to Silk Factor Studio, a company run by Bera Ivanishvili, the ex-prime minister's son. A public outcry forced the parties to cancel the deal, and Silk Factor donated the lighting and other gear instead.

Maglaperidze's "only media experience was working at Bidzina Ivanishvili's channel," Jangirashvili said. "He was chosen for his political affiliation and political trustworthiness. ... He lacks vision on how a public broadcaster should function."

Adjara TV, by contrast, received high marks from panel members, who unanimously agreed it operates in accord with the standards and philosophy of a public broadcaster. Nina Ivanishvili (no relation to Bidzina Ivanishvili), dean of the Caucasus School of Journalism and Media Management at the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs (GIPA), said picking up the RFE/RL programs dropped by GPB's 1TV channel has helped boost Adjara's audience.

"If we are speaking about the protection of journalists, the Public Ombudsman covers this area, and if we are talking about self-regulation, we already have such bodies," Dzvelishvili said. "There is no need to set up additional institutions, especially those under the government."

GPB could also benefit from amendments to the Law on Broadcasting that were given final approval by the parliament on December 22, after the Media Sustainability Index (MSI) panel had convened. The revised law lifts GPB's obligation to follow the Law on Public Procurement: it will no longer have to announce public tenders when purchasing media products or services. The law also allows the channel to double advertising airtime, from 30 minutes per 24 hours to 60 minutes; halve free airtime allocated for public-service messages from 24 to 12 minutes; and accept sponsorship of entertainment programs and television series.

Prior to adoption, the amendments were roundly criticized by civil-society groups. The Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI) said the draft disregarded the true value of the public broadcaster, and GCJE released a

statement signed by various nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) saying the legislation risks "enabling nontransparent activities by GPB and corruption, weakens public control over GPB, and creates a noncompetitive environment in the media advertising market."

There were threats to media freedom on the judicial front. Eva Gotsiridze, a member of the High Council of Justice of Georgia, sought to restrict open reporting of court cases, arguing that it made courts vulnerable to outside influences and that self-regulating mechanisms were inadequate. "We assessed this as an attempt of censorship," GCJE's Dzvelishvili said. Gotsiridze was subsequently appointed to the Constitutional Court of Georgia, a move Dzvelishvili said suggests that "some of our leading political forces share her values."

Gotsiridze has been a staunch defender of Tamaz Urtmelidze, the Tbilisi City Court judge who presided over the politically charged Rustavi 2 ownership case. On March 2, 2017, the Georgia Supreme Court upheld Urtmelidze's decision granting 100 percent control of the channel to Kibar Khalvashi, its former owner and reportedly a Georgian Dream ally. Khalvashi claimed Rustavi 2 was taken from him by the previous administration of Mikheil Saakashvili, and he sued to regain control. The case was widely viewed as a political struggle over the station, which has backed the opposition United National Movement.

Rustavi 2's management, which fought the ownership change, appealed to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), which on March 4 ordered Georgia's government to suspend the Supreme Court ruling—which it did—and to "abstain from interfering with the applicant company's editorial policy in any manner." Koridze said the government "failed to realize that [the case] was about freedom of expression and not about identity of the owner,"

leading to the ECHR decision. Kintsurashvili called the European court's ruling "foundational" for media pluralism in Georgia.

The same week as the Rustavi 2 rulings, Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili proposed establishing a Media Ombudsman's Office to monitor the country's media environment and its development.¹ Panelists said the media community views the new office as unnecessary. "If we are speaking about the protection of journalists, the Public Ombudsman covers this area, and if we are talking about self-regulation, we already have such bodies," Dzvelishvili said. "There is no need to set up additional institutions, especially those under the government."

Georgian journalists expressed shock and dismay over the abduction in May of Azerbaijani investigative reporter Afgan Mukhtarli, the highest profile case of violence against a journalist in Georgia in 2017. Mukhtarli and his wife went into exile in Tbilisi in 2015, fearing for his safety after he reported on corruption in the Azerbaijani military. He had since been investigating the Georgian business holdings of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev's family. On May 29, he went missing from Tbilisi; the next day, Amnesty International reported that he was in detention in Baku and "at risk of torture and other ill treatment." According to his lawyer, Mukhtarli was snatched off a Tbilisi street by plain-clothed men who spoke Georgian; they beat him, placed a bag over his head, and took him to the border.

Through his lawyer, Mukhtarli asserted that his assailants in Tbilisi were members of the Georgian security force. In a joint statement issued by TI Georgia, several human-rights organizations expressed doubt that the arrest could have taken place "without at least a willing ignorance

or ineffective work of Georgian state institutions, if not with their active support and direct participation." Kvirikashvili denied involvement by Georgian authorities "in any such activity."² Jinjikhadze of OSGF alleged the government concealed details of the case and "prevented journalists from obtaining information collected from street security cameras."

Jinjikhadze said many Georgian journalists view the incident as an indication that "Georgia is no longer a safe country and his abduction poses a threat to every one of them." While some outlets "uncritically reiterat[ed] government positions" on the incident, many journalists engaged in public protests. Notably, in the days after the abduction, several prominent television presenters wore bags over their heads during their shows and in appearances before the Georgian parliament's Human Rights and Civil Integration Committee.

Radio Marneuli director Kamila Mamedova told TI she came under pressure from regional officials over critical reports by the community station, which serves a border region in southeastern Georgia.³ Mamedova said she and her staff were threatened on the phone and in social media and private conversations, and a fake Facebook account spread information about her personal life. She appealed to police to investigate.

Neither slander nor libel are criminal offenses in Georgia; if either is proved, a civil award for damages is applied. There were several cases of libel adjudicated in 2017; panelists noted one

involving Nanuka's Show, a talk show on Rustavi 2, which a court ordered to correct defamatory statements made by a divorced couple in an interview. Panel members questioned the court's decision to hold the station accountable for statements that were made by guests rather than by journalists or hosts.

In September, Georgia succeeded France in chairing the Open Government Partnership, a multilateral initiative aimed at promoting transparency and accountability among member governments. Despite such public commitments to openness, panel members said access to public information in Georgia is gradually worsening. A draft Freedom of Information Act prepared in 2015 is stalled, and public institutions commonly withhold information under the guise of protecting personal data or privacy rights. As in previous years, release of information by public agencies is protracted, and the data provided to journalists are often incomplete. Gela Mtvlishvili, director of the Kakheti Information Center, said there were occasions in 2017 when administrative bodies told him that they would not release information to him because they did not trust him.

A controversial provision of the new Georgian constitution that sets grounds for when the government can permissibly withhold public information was watered down in the amendment process. The constitution approved by the parliament on first reading in September 2017 included language sought by the Ministry of Justice allowing nondisclosure if requested information contains state, professional, commercial, or personal secrets. Civil society and some lawmakers criticized that standard as too broad. On second reading in December, it was amended to eliminate personal confidentiality as grounds for withholding information and set parameters for recognizing

1 "PM Kvirikashvili Mulls Media Ombudsman's Office," Civil Georgia, <http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=29907>.

2 "Georgian Officials on Azerbaijani Journalist's Alleged Abduction," Civil Georgia, June 1, 2017, <http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=30149>.

3 "Possible instances of intimidation of Radio Marneuli journalists," Transparency International Georgia, July 6, 2017, <http://www.transparency.ge/en/post/possible-instances-intimidation-radio-marneuli-journalists>.

state secrets, defined as information “necessary in a democratic society for ensuring national security or public safety, or interests of legal proceedings.” IDFI said these grounds, “upon good-faith interpretation, may be considered legitimate for restricting access to public information” but expressed hope that “their inclusion in the constitution does not create a future risk of excessive, disproportionate restriction of the right at the legislative level.”⁴ The new constitution is set to take effect after the 2018 presidential election.

The parliament established a new unit within the State Security Service, the Operative-Technical Agency, which is charged with carrying out secret surveillance. This change was prompted by the Constitutional Court’s 2016 ruling that sections of the law on electronic communication that gave the Security Service direct, unrestricted access to telecom operators were unconstitutional. Under the previous legal regime, politicians and media figures were routinely victimized by leaks of secret recordings. The new law was criticized by nongovernmental organizations affiliated with IDFI’s This Affects You campaign, telecom companies, the Public Defender’s Office, and the president of Georgia, who said it runs counter to the court’s decision and expands government surveillance powers.

Panel members say access to foreign information sources is not restricted in any way. Freedom House’s Freedom on the Net 2017 report gives Georgia a score of 24 on a 0-to-100 scale,

with 100 representing “least free.”⁵ The report found “few indications of censorship or online content manipulation by the Georgian authorities” but said “unreliable and politically biased content, including anti-Western propaganda, also proliferated online.” Freedom House noted Georgia’s “increasingly diverse” online media environment and growing blogosphere but added that “there are few bloggers who create content that has an impact on the political agenda, or who spark widespread discussion online.”

The government applies no restrictions to the journalism profession, either in terms of students entering university programs or journalists already in the workforce.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

2.36

The score for this objective was virtually unchanged from last year. Panelists said major events receive extensive and varied coverage and adherence to media ethics codes is improving. However, self-censorship is still widely practiced, especially at pro-government outlets, and political preferences often outweigh professional standards.

Jinjikhadze said reporting is often formally balanced but lacking in depth. “We see all sides of the story present, but journalists themselves cannot tell a story,” she said. “This compels me to say that the quality of journalism hasn’t improved much.”

As was the case during 2016’s national elections, political considerations deeply affected coverage of major issues, panelists said. Jangirashvili cited Imedi TV’s handling of Panorama Tbilisi, a massive development project backed by Bidzina Ivanishvili that has sparked public protests and resistance from preservationists and environmental activists.

“[Imedi’s] coverage of Panorama Tbilisi was positive and did not mention the protests by the political opposition and civil society at the Tbilisi City Assembly against the mayor’s office’s decision to hand over a piece of land in Tbilisi Old Town to Ivanishvili. This news story is an example of a blatant violation of journalism standards,” Jangirashvili said. “If this happened in some marginal media, we would not worry that much, but this has been happening on the most-watched national television outlets.”

European Union- and United Nations-funded monitoring of prime-time news programs on 14 national and regional television stations in the six months prior to October 2017 elections for municipal and local offices found that six of the channels allocated the most airtime to Georgian Dream—a change from past years, when the ruling party received the most coverage on a majority of channels.⁶ Election coverage on the 20 online media outlets analyzed was found to be superficial but reasonably balanced and impartial. The monitoring of 12 newspapers published in Tbilisi and the regions showed regular use of “offensive or discriminating terminology” in capital-based papers but none in the regional outlets, which largely covered

4 “Constitutional Amendments Change the Grounds for Restricting Access to Public Information,” Institute for Development of Freedom of Information, December 22, 2017, https://idfi.ge/en/access_to_information_bases_changed_following_the_constitutional_ammendments_in_georgia.

5 “Georgia Country Profile,” Freedom on the Net 2017, Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2017/georgia>.

6 Results of Media Monitoring for the 2017 Local Self-Governance Elections in Georgia, The European Union for Georgia and the United Nations Development Programme, http://mediamonitor.ge/uploads_script/accounts/MM_FINAL_REPORT_2017_ENG.pdf.

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.
- ▶ 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 exists (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

political forces impartially, actively addressed social issues in their communities, and cited diverse sources of information.

GCJE's pre-election monitoring of television talk shows revealed many instances of hosts asking superficial questions or none at all, leaving the platform entirely to political candidates, Dzvelishvili said.

Most panelists said ethical violations in television news and information programs are becoming less common. Along with codes of conduct enshrined in the Law on Broadcasting, GCJE has become an important instrument for encouraging ethical behavior. Dzvelishvili said a growing number of media outlets are becoming more sensitive to professional standards. "We are receiving calls from journalists, including those from mainstream media, asking us how to cover different

topics," she said. In 2017, GCJE crafted themed sets of guidelines for reporting on gender issues, court cases, and mental health.

In December, GPB faced a wave of criticism from Georgian writers and media ethics watchdogs for airing video footage released by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of poet Zviad Ratiani's arrest in Tbilisi. Grigol Gogelia, chairman of GPB's board of trustees, declared that showing such material infringed on Ratiani's human rights and the public broadcaster's standards.

Journalists are increasingly using social media to hunt for or flesh out stories and get access to sources, panelists said. Kintsurashvili and Mtivlishvili said this can result in the spread of fake news and other violations of professional and ethical standards. Mtivlishvili added that plagiarism is rampant in some online media, and it is impossible to trace culprits due to the proliferation of questionable media portals, which have no difficulty obtaining low-cost domains.

The use of discriminatory and hate speech remains problematic. On May 29, MDF lodged a complaint with GCJE over an article in the newspaper Rezonansi headlined "Arabs, Indians, Iranians, and Turks distribute Georgian lands among themselves." MDF charged that the article violates ethical standards by engaging in xenophobia and encouraging discrimination. The GCJE board upheld the complaint.

Kintsurashvili, MDF's director, also cited the tabloid Asavali Dasavali, notorious for its dissemination of hate speech, xenophobia, and anti-Western rhetoric, as a routine transgressor of ethical and professional standards. She divides Georgian media into two categories: "On one side there are those who are reacting to criticism, and on the other are those who don't care" what media professionals say.

Outlets well regarded for their ethical standards

and impartial, quality reporting include Liberali magazine; the newspaper Batumelebi; news websites Netgazeti, OC Media, and On.ge; and broadcaster RFE/RL.

Panelists said journalists who work for pro-government outlets are aware of boundaries they should not cross. "When you work in such an organization, your producer doesn't have to remind you every time what topics to cover and how to report on them. Everything is already clear," Jangirashvili said. "You know what editorial policy line the outlet follows; you know which topics are preferred by your management, and you do it. In other words, you practice self-censorship."

"We see all sides of the story present, but journalists themselves cannot tell a story," she said. "This compels me to say that the quality of journalism hasn't improved much."

Corporate as well as political interests can foster self-censorship. Jangirashvili said some large businesses can "literally wipe out" material that puts them in an unfavorable light. Nestan Tsetskhladze, editor of Netgazeti, said the site's negotiations with a company for large-scale advertising fell apart because the firm insisted Netgazeti not report on the company or its business practices. "The outrageous thing was when they told me, everyone else"—referring to other media with which the company was negotiating—"had already revoked the coverage," she said.

Instances of self-censorship arising from social or religious pressure are declining, panel members said, noting extensive coverage of the so-called "cyanide case," in which a Georgian Orthodox archpriest was convicted of planning to poison a top aide to the church's patriarch.

Major events are widely covered, but panelists said that to get a spectrum of perspectives on them, Georgians must read and watch news across different platforms. How events are covered depends on who is reporting on them, said Nino Danelia, a media professor from Ilia State University. "If there were no Rustavi 2, a staunch government critic, it would have been very easy for mainstream media not to broadcast or to camouflage some [events]," she said.

Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficient relative to the cost of living, most panel members said. Salaries average around \$500 a month for full-time staff at online media outlets; in television, they can reach several thousand dollars. Nina Ivanishvili said some young journalists favor freelancing for various local and international media and project-based work because it can add up to more pay than a full-time job.

News and entertainment take up more or less equal shares of programming for private and public broadcasters, even though 2017 saw a number of social and political talk shows go off the air.

Almost all large television companies, whether in Tbilisi or in the regions, have poor technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news, panel members said. The exception is Imedi TV, which has relatively high-quality facilities. Mtvishvili says Imedi can distribute news so quickly that the only way his news agency can keep up viewership in its home region of Kakheti is to report live on Facebook with a smartphone.

Some outlets engage in investigations and other niche reporting, but the quality is middling and they are little known to the general audience. Most programs that focus on business, economics, and health are "boring and obscure," Nina Ivanishvili said. "Journalists must know the themes well to be

able to convey complex ideas in a simple way," she added, but staff shortages and time pressures make doing so "very hard work." Koridze said business and economics shows on the major national channels are intended more to attract advertising from companies than to inform the public on these topics. For many years, much of the best investigative content has been produced by Monitor, a small studio that has drawn local and international attention. Kavkasia TV airs its work.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

2.53

Georgia has a multitude of news outlets that provide diverse perspectives, ensuring a plurality of news sources. However, the politicization and polarization of media that marked coverage of the national elections in 2016 continued to harden in 2017, and panelists said GPB—the outlet with the greatest legal and ethical duty to reflect the broader political spectrum—is systematically abdicating that duty. News agencies were also seen as abandoning their traditional role.

There was general agreement on the panel that the quantity of diverse outlets gives Georgians access to a variety of sources and viewpoints, but some members said this was plurality in form, not in function. Reflecting the latter view, Kintsurashvili and Jangirashvili noted the ongoing politicization of major national media. "Every party in Georgia has its own television station. This is an old story," Jangirashvili said.

According to the Caucasus Resource Research Center (CRRCC), television is the primary source of information on politics and current events for 73

percent of the population; 19 percent rely mostly on the Internet, and only 1 percent get most of their news from newspapers and magazines.⁷ Television channels Imedi, Maestro, GDS, and GPB are distinctly pro-government. Rustavi 2 remains linked with the opposition United National Movement, following the ECHR's suspension of a Georgian court ruling that would have turned the station over to an owner affiliated with Georgian Dream. Obiektivi TV and Iberia TV reflect the ultranationalist stance of the Alliance of Patriots of Georgia.

There are no laws restricting Georgians' access to domestic or international media. However, access to six terrestrial television stations—including Rustavi 2 and Imedi TV, the most-watched channels—was threatened in 2017 by an ownership dispute. Those two channels—along with Maestro, GDS, Comedy Channel, and Marao—demanded payment from cable operators for distribution of their programming, under threat of blocking retransmission by cable networks. Cable companies resisted, arguing that "must carry," a legal provision requiring them to include national broadcasters in their channel packages, precludes those outlets from demanding payment. Cable firms said the fees the broadcasters sought would have increased cable subscribers' monthly fees by 2 GEL (about 80 US cents). The matter came to a head on October 17 when dozens of cable operators temporarily ceased transmission of six channels. The dispute was settled in December with no increase in subscriber fees, and GNCC said it would weigh amendments to the broadcasting law, including possible abolition of the

7 "NDI: Public attitudes in Georgia, June 2017." Caucasus Research Resource Center, <http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nj2017ge/INFSOU1/>.

must-carry principle.⁸

Technological and infrastructure challenges also restricted some Georgians' access to media. As the country switches over to digital television, some remote regions lack necessary equipment. For example, Nino Narimanishvili, the editor of regional radio station Samkhretis Karibche, said construction of a new multiplex to serve the largely Armenian-speaking Samtskhe-Javakheti region is hindered by

8 "Details about the meeting between the Georgian National Communications Commission Members and Cable Operators," Cable Televisions Union of Georgia, December 1, 2017, <http://cable-tv.ge/news/details-about-the-meeting-between-the-georgian-national-communications-commission-members-and-cable-operators.html>.

Multiple news sources provide citizens with reliable and objective news.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS

- A plurality of affordable public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet) exists.
- Independent broadcast media produce their own news programs.
- Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
- Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.
- Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.
- Broadcast ratings, circulation figures, and Internet statistics are reliable.

the fact that relatively few families own the set-top boxes necessary for digital television reception.

Panelists were harshly critical of GPB, noting changes they said ran counter to the public broadcaster's mission to offer diverse programming spanning genres, political views, and minority concerns. GPB's content reshuffle under a new director included temporarily cancelling direct broadcast of parliamentary hearings and committee sessions on its second channel, 2TV, (which was ultimately restored) and dropping four major talk shows, leaving audiences with a deficit of critical social and political content in the run-up to local-government elections in October. "It is because of 1TV that pluralism has declined this year. GPB broke all records," Jangirashvili said.

Mtivlishvili said very little regional news is covered in prime time on GPB, and in 2017 the broadcaster shifted programming aimed at serving minority communities in Akhalkalaki and Kvemo Kartli—home to predominantly Armenian- and Azerbaijani-speaking populations, respectively—off the airwaves and on to GPB's website. Panel members said scarcity of Internet penetration in those areas limits viewership of the programs.

There are several dozen news agencies in Georgia, but panel members said they are drifting away from objectivity and are increasingly compromised by political or financial interests. InterpressNews (IPN) introduced a new business model for news agencies built on creating content for subscribers, offering a range of paid services that can include space for clients' announcements on the IPN.ge website, writing and distributing news about clients to other media, and even covering events and preparing press releases at the clients' request.

Some news agencies' content is rife with disinformation and manipulation, Kintsurashvili said. On November 9, 2017, Saqinform published an article,

based on a report by state-run Russian news service TASS, about a UN resolution initiated by Russia the previous year condemning glorification of Nazi, neo-Nazi, and similar organizations. The measure was approved by a vote of 136–2, with 48 abstentions; the opposing countries were the United States and Ukraine. Saqinform's article was accompanied by a photo-illustration juxtaposing the US and Ukrainian

Nina Ivanishvili and Jangirashvili said that with Imedi TV's acquisition of GDS and Maestro, it became apparent in 2017 that Georgia has "openly oligarchic" ownership in its media. "Do the people know who owns the media they use? No, they do not," Koridze said.

flags with a swastika and the caption, "USA and Ukraine voted against glorification of Nazism in the UN." The article did not note the reasons for the "no" votes: The United States believed the resolution violated the principles of free expression and assembly and conflicted with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Ukraine said it would not support such a resolution unless Stalinism and neo-Stalinism were condemned as well.

Independent Georgian broadcasters produce their own news programs, although regional media do so mostly for local coverage and rely on outside providers for national news.

Panelists questioned the reliability of what outlets disclose about their ownership, despite a provision of the Law on Broadcasting requiring broadcast media to make such information public. Georgian law does not obligate print and online media to report on their ownership, further reducing transparency.

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GEORGIA

became apparent in 2017 that Georgia has “openly oligarchic” ownership in its media. “Do the people know who owns the media they use? No, they do not,” Koridze said.

Imedi TV is owned by the Georgia Media Production Group, 100 percent of the shares of which are controlled by Inna Gudavadze, a citizen of Russia and the widow of the company's founder, Badri Patarkatsishvili, who was Georgia's wealthiest man at the time of his death in 2008. A declaration available on the company's website lists seven members of its board of trustees: four citizens of Russia, two Georgian citizens, and an American. Panelists said the trustees are mostly unknown to the Georgian public and have no track record in the media business.

“We see that investments in 2016 into most of the television companies came from their owners and the question arises: What are the implications for editorial policy?” Jangirashvili said.

Since the merger was announced, Imedi TV and Maestro have united their newsrooms, which could have implications for media plurality. Jangirashvili said the arrangement flouts regulations on concentration of a broadcaster's property. “The law prohibits a person, independently or in cooperation with an interdependent person, from possessing more than one general over-the-air television channel and one over-the-air radio channel per service area. GNCC contends that this is not a breach of the law,” she said. “This is a real threat for GNCC to have the bravado to interpret the law in such a way owing to political influences.”

The media's ability to serve a broad spectrum of social interests suffered a blow with GPB's shift of minority-language newscasts to the Web. Owing to language barriers, minority communities get much of their news and public-affairs coverage from donor-funded community outlets, including Radio Marneuli and Radio Ivrisi (Azerbaijani); Radio

Nori, Aliq Media, Samkhretis Karibche, and Jainews (Armenian); and Radio Way in Pankisi (Chechen).

Samkhretis Karibche, which serves the Meskheti region in southern Georgia, has begun collaborating on news content with Radio Nori, which serves neighboring Javakheti. Narimanishvili said the exchange has been positive for both communities: “Javakheti's population receives our news more often now, and vice versa.” She noted, however, that Georgian media programming for these regions remains sparse: “Their [satellite] dishes are turned in another direction to get news about Armenia.”

“These communities are mostly living in another informational space. They only physically live in our country,” Jinjikhadze said. Ivanishvili added, “This is our problem, not theirs ... our government has not created good conditions for them. As soon as the government does this, they will turn to us.”

Georgian media do not systematically follow international events, with little coverage of even the country's South Caucasus neighbors. Only online outlets Netgazeti and OC Media regularly offer news about Armenia and Azerbaijan, with Netgazeti featuring daily updates of the events from all three Caucasus countries.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

1.60

Continued contraction of the television advertising market was the media-business headline for 2017, which saw the score for this metric inch downward from 1.62 to 1.60. The financial terrain for broadcasters looks set to get rockier if legislation takes effect allowing GPB to enter the fray for dwindling ad revenue. The economic challenges played out

in a consolidation of major channels (although panelists noted that could have more to do with politics than with money), popular programs switching stations, and a fee fight between terrestrial broadcasters and cable operators. Exactly how deep the problems run is hard to determine: At the time of writing, GNCC, in seeming violation of its legal duties, has yet to release 2017 revenue figures for some big broadcasters.

That lapse makes it difficult to assess the exact size of the advertising market. Using data from ad sellers, TVMRGE, ABG Nielsen's licensee for audience measurement in Georgia, estimated 2017 television ad revenue at about GEL 70 million (\$27.8 million). If accurate, that would mean the market shrank by approximately 25 percent from 2016, when GNCC's official data showed GEL 93 million (\$37.4 million) in television revenue.

GNCC's partial failure to publish revenue data made it difficult to assess the financial impact of major industry changes, such as the merger of Imedi TV, Maestro, and GDS, announced in late 2016, and the defection of several popular shows from Rustavi 2 to Imedi TV. “Nobody knows how these changes altered market shares,” Jangirashvili said.

Panel members said the media market, already small, has been buffeted by Georgia's economic slowdown of the past few years. It could be further shaken by an amendment to the Law on Broadcasting, sought by GPB and approved by the parliament late in the year, which would allow the national public broadcaster to compete with private outlets for advertisers. Media companies and NGOs are urging President Giorgi Margvelashvili to veto the measure.

“The market is already overloaded, unable to generate sufficient revenues for even the largest

Independent media are well-managed businesses, allowing editorial independence.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS

- ▶ Media outlets and supporting firms operate as efficient, professional, and profit-generating businesses.
- ▶ 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 at commercial outlets.
- ▶ Independent media do not receive government subsidies.
- ▶ Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor products to the needs and interests of audiences.
- ▶ Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are reliably and independently produced.

players. The appearance of another big player in the form of GPB, which already receives substantial funds from the [state] budget, will further deteriorate the media market and its sustainability,” Jangirashvili said. GNCC supported GPB’s initiative to enter the ad market, a position Jangirashvili said “breached its role of objective arbitrator.”

Financial and legal problems continued to dog Rustavi 2. The court fight over ownership of the most-watched television channel, detailed above, remains unresolved, resulting in some of the company’s bank accounts being frozen and a portion of its property being under sequestration. The station has seen a steep drop in revenue from government advertising—from GEL 2.1 million (\$833,000) in 2015 to just over GEL 500,000

(U\$200,000) in 2017, according to an MDF report.⁹ During the same period, government advertising with Imedi TV more than doubled to about GEL 2.5 million (\$1 million).

Amid the instability and declining revenue, Rustavi 2 underwent a reorganization, reducing staff and cutting salaries. It also lost a number of high-rated shows and popular hosts to Imedi TV.

Rustavi 2 and Imedi TV were on the same side of a fight, led by six national broadcasters, to wring payments from cable operators for retransmission of their signals. Along with challenging “must carry, must offer” (the legally enshrined principle requiring cable operators to carry the national channels, which in turn must provide their signals for free), the attempt showed that broadcasters are trying to diversify their revenue sources, departing from a past practice of relying almost entirely on advertising. “It will affect the media market, as other television stations will follow in the six’s footsteps,” Jangirashvili said. “That may lead to turning terrestrial channels into paid channels, eventually limiting the population’s access to media.”

Panelists said diversifying revenue sources is crucial to sustaining smaller television stations and online and print media. Zura Vardiashvili, editor of Liberali, said the magazine’s special project “Chveni Tamashi” (Our Game) drew significant revenue. Supported by TBC Bank, the project launched in October 2017 and involved publication of a special edition on Georgian rugby, in conjunction with a touch-rugby festival with open public participation.

Panel members also emphasized the importance of donor organizations and other types

of financial support. “Without grants, many if not all small media outlets will fail to survive,” Jinjikhadze said. Ivanishvili said donors should shift from “helping small media in general” to assisting “outlets that have distinguished themselves for continually creating quality content and news.”

The emergence of a new, dominant player in selling television advertising raised alarms of a possible return to the monopolization that marked the ad market in the recent past. Inter Media LLC launched in December 2016 and since January 2017 has been selling all advertising time for the six largest television stations—Rustavi 2, Imedi TV, Marao, Comedy Channel, GDS, and Maestro—and a portion of ad time on Pirveli and Kavkasia TV. Panelists worried about diminished competition and financial fallout for media outlets outside the majors.

“The market is already overloaded, unable to generate sufficient revenues for even the largest players. The appearance of another big player in the form of GPB, which already receives substantial funds from the [state] budget, will further deteriorate the media market and its sustainability,” Jangirashvili said.

“Inter Media can offer discounts to its clients on the condition that they air ads on all the sales house’s contractors’ channels,” Jangirashvili said, potentially “leaving other channels without advertising.”

Most of the owners and executives of Inter Media held high-level positions at General Media, the politically connected ad-sales company that took over the market in 2011, when it was formed from the merger of what were then two major ad brokers. General Media broke up with the change of

9 Pataridze, Mariam, Pre-Election Financial Media Environment, Media Development Foundation, https://www.scribd.com/document/362106174/Pre-Election-Financial-Media-Environment-2017#from_embed.

government in 2013, but panel members expressed concern that Inter Media could bring back its monopolistic practices.

In summer 2017, the government announced new procedures for procuring broadcast and online advertising time. Rather than various government entities purchasing ad time individually, the government as a whole would make two single buys: a GEL 2 million contract (approximately \$831,000) for advertising on major channels and GEL 1 million (\$415,555) for smaller stations. The larger contract was awarded to pro-government Imedi TV. Rustavi 2, the only other possible competitor on the basis of ratings, challenged the decision in court, claiming the State Procurement Agency did not notify it of the bid deadline in time.

Less is known about how the government distributed its online ad buys, which amounted to more than GEL 1 million (\$415,555) in 2016. Jangirashvili said Internet publications are more reliant than television on government spending. "A significant part of the online media is financed from the budget," she said. "The fact that such media operate does not mean that they operate as business entities."

The television market remained split between two television-audience measurers (TAMs): TVMRGE, ABG Nielsen's licensee, and Tri Media Intelligence, a Kantar Media affiliate launched at the start of 2016. Problematically, the two TAMs provide conflicting data, panel members said. This created confusion and mistrust among advertisers, another factor driving the decline in ad spending.

"While one measurer was reporting about our ratings going up, another was reporting a decrease. I, too, question the data of both companies," said Natia Kapanadze, director of Adjara TV. The panelists said the television market is unlikely to bear competing TAMs for long. There remains no

reliable, independent resources for online and print media readership.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

2.51

The slight increase in this score from 2.46 to 2.51 reflects ongoing efforts by support organizations and donors to foster sustainable media in Georgia, compensating for what the industry cannot accomplish on its own. A small and more or less stable number of professional associations and civil society groups work to promote the interests of individual journalists and media outlets, including the Media Advocacy Coalition, the Georgia Young Lawyers Association (GYLA), TI Georgia, GCJE, the Media Club, the Media Development Foundation, and the Georgian Regional Media Association, which primarily represents the interests of regional print and online outlets.

One significant change in the media support landscape in 2017 was the split in the Georgian Association of Regional Broadcasters (GARB). In August, nine of its 21 members withdrew from the 12-year-old organization and formed the Alliance of Broadcasters (AB), chaired by Natia Kuprashvili, the former executive director of GARB (and an MSI panelist).

Kuprashvili said the interests of the nine founding AB members had diverged dramatically from those of their GARB peers as donor funding for media outlets declined, and some participants saw a need to change working and fundraising practices. "This was a values-based conflict," she said. "There were large broadcasters oriented

toward high-quality content creation, ready to take novel approaches to content production and sharing. The majority of GARB members are small media companies that apparently wanted to have guaranteed sources of funding without substantial effort." She noted that the GARB studio, which creates content of national relevance for regional broadcasters that do not have their own people in the capital, has mostly been retransmitting news from government sources and television series from Mosfilm, the largest and oldest studio in Russia.

Within four months, AB membership had grown to 17 broadcasters, including some community radio stations. Kuprashvili says the new association has taken innovative approaches to content production;

Supporting institutions function in the professional interests of independent media.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- ▶ Trade associations represent the interests of private media owners and provide member services.
- ▶ Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights.
- ▶ Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- ▶ Sources of newsprint NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- ▶ Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.
- ▶ Printing facilities are in private hands, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- ▶ Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- ▶ Information and communication technology infrastructure sufficiently meets the needs of media and citizens.

for example, “they create common content and merge forces in attracting advertising money.”

Most panel members said GCJE, an independent union of journalists that aims to raise professional and ethical standards and develop mechanisms for media self-regulation, has grown into a highly professional organization and an effective advocate for quality journalism. In 2017, it considered 56 complaints of alleged ethical violations brought by citizens, media, NGOs, and

la Mamaladze, editor of *Guria News* in western Georgia, said the kind of support widely available for media in Tbilisi is not always present in the regions. “Sometimes we have difficulty finding respondents among the regional branches of the NGOs who can provide expertise on certain topics,” she said.

even the Ministry of Interior.

The role and impact of the NGO sector has been gradually increasing, and 2017 was a very active year in this regard. “The more the media are suffering, the higher is the role of NGOs,” Nina Ivanishvili said. Panel members say the Media Advocacy Coalition, the Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center (EMC), and TI have been particularly vocal. Civil society was deeply engaged in the outcry over Azerbaijani investigative journalist Mukhtali’s abduction from Tbilisi and the Rustavi 2 ownership case. “If there had not been unanimity and integrity among civil society and the media, the disputed Georgia Supreme Court ruling on Rustavi 2 would have been enforced,” Jangirashvili said.

Several donors fund efforts by Georgian media outlets to provide unbiased and diverse

coverage of current events. IREX’s Georgian Media Partnership Program, funded by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State through the Public Affairs Section of the U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi, supports professional development in Georgian media through partnerships with US media outlets. With funds raised from international donors, Internews implements the Strengthening Independent Media in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine project. This initiative works to improve access to information and media literacy among citizens of the target countries. Another IREX program, Media for Transparent and Accountable Governance, known as M-TAG and funded by USAID, aims to strengthen journalism in Georgia and ensure sustainability of regional media outlets, improving the public’s access to independent, reliable, and balanced reporting.

la Mamaladze, editor of *Guria News* in western Georgia, said the kind of support widely available for media in Tbilisi is not always present in the regions. “Sometimes we have difficulty finding respondents among the regional branches of the NGOs who can provide expertise on certain topics,” she said.

Although they actively voice support for media freedom and independence, NGOs are not always there to lend a helping hand to individual journalists facing legal and other travails, some panelists said. “It is, of course, very good when NGOs make statements to defend you, but it is also crucial when someone studies your case and provides legal assistance,” Tsetskhladze said. “In the past, the media center of the Georgian Young Lawyers Association was doing this. We are journalists, not lawyers, and cannot do this on our own all the time.” Kintsurashvili said it is up to donors to decide to whom they give money to ensure more thorough legal support for journalists.

High-quality education programs are available

for prospective journalists, but panel members say there is a need for more. Koridze singled out the Caucasus School of Journalism and Media Management at GIPA for developing a vision of the kind of content it should provide to its students. “The curriculum there is well planned, and every professor knows what the students learn in different classes. This way, students receive a very good outcome,” he said.

There are fewer options at regional institutions. Narimanishvili said the journalism program in Samtskhe-Javakheti State University has closed, and Mtvlishvili said Telavi State University’s journalism program has only four students. They attribute the disinterest to a low quality of teaching offered to journalism students.

From November 2016 through December 2017, GIPA’s journalism school held a one-year training program, entitled Multimedia Skills and Literacy for Ethnic Communities, aimed at equipping budding young leaders from Armenian and Azerbaijani communities in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Marneuli with multimedia, business, and social-entrepreneurship skills and greater understanding of the news and media environment. The project was fully funded and supported by the US Embassy in Tbilisi and was delivered in minority languages. The school hired its Azerbaijani and Armenian graduates as trainers’ assistants.

There are ample trainings offered to journalists, but Mtvlishvili and Tsetskhladze said they often refuse to attend programs funded by state bodies and private businesses, which sometimes use their resources to take journalists to luxury hotels and give them gifts, potentially undermining the independence of participants and, ultimately, the media products they create.

Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are apolitical and in private hands, but Koridze said

the scarcity of providers could restrict publications' access to these resources. For example, he noted that there are three companies in Tbilisi that can print Batumelebi in its current format: Favorite, owned by the newspaper Kviris Palitra; Cezanne, the most expensive option; and a third belonging to Asavali Dasavali, where production quality is low. Batumelebi favors Favorite but sometimes sees its jobs delayed for a few days "because [the printer] thinks the client will wait, having no other choice," Koridze said.

On the television side, panel members said the infrastructure of multiplexes and the functionality of the multiplex networks in Georgian regions is unsatisfactory. Dzvelishvili said many people in the regions complain that they do not receive terrestrial broadcast channels. She said GNCC must monitor the situation and make recommendations to multiplex owners.

List of Panel Participants

Dimitry Availiani, editor, JAMnews Georgia, Tbilisi

Nino Danelia, journalism professor, Ilia State University; independent media expert, Tbilisi

Nata Dzvelishvili, executive director, Georgian Charter of Journalism Ethics, Tbilisi

Nina Ivanishvili, dean, Caucasus School of Journalism and Media Management, Georgian Institute of Public Affairs, Tbilisi

Nino Jangirashvili, director, Kavkasia TV, Tbilisi

Hatia Jinjikhadze, media-support program manager, Open Society Georgia Foundation, Tbilisi

Natia Kapanadze, director, Adjara TV, Batumi

Zviad Koridze, Independent media expert, Tbilisi

Natia Kuprashvili, director, Alliance of Broadcasters, Tbilisi

Ia Mamaladze, publisher, Guria News, Chokhatauri

Maia Mikashavidze, director, multimedia project, Internews Georgia, Tbilisi

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Tamar Kintsurashvili, Director, Media Development Foundation, Tbilisi

Nestan Tsetskhladze, editor, Netgazeti, Tbilisi

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