

---

*The MSI panelists expressed the opinion that, overall, the media sector is less polarized and balance is more visible.*



# GEORGIA

Shortly before the October 2013 presidential elections, then-Georgia Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili invited 16 journalists to his private residence in Tbilisi. During the lengthy meeting, he scolded the journalists for “dilettantism” and irresponsibility—sparking indignation from the media community.

Ivanishvili had long taken an interest in the media: his family owned the television station Channel 9. Yet in the run-up to the vote, just one year after the station launched, Ivanishvili closed it down, leaving hundreds of its employees in the lurch. Ivanishvili explained this move by arguing that politicians should avoid bias and not be linked closely to media outlets. However, after the elections that brought Ivanishvili’s handpicked successor, Giorgi Margvelashvili, to power, Ivanishvili retired from politics.

Back in 2012, parliamentary elections resulted in significant changes in media ownership and editorial policies, bringing a new, almost unheard-of competitiveness to the market. Throughout 2013, media members maintained the status quo while thinking about how to re-orient the media following the presidential election—a question that remains open-ended for 2014.

The media’s biggest regulatory news in 2013 related to the reform of the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB). Civil society groups helped advance a bill, which the parliament approved, to transform the composition of GPB and turn state-owned Adjara TV into a public broadcaster. Nestan Tsetskhladze, editor-in-chief of Netgazeti.ge, said that the new legislation is “major progress. Journalists are not state servants anymore. And the country does not have Adjara State TV, which is a big step forward.”

Compared to 2012, when audiences needed several media sources to gain a balanced picture, today the media present more diverse perspectives. “Must-carry, must-offer” regulations for cable networks under the Law on Broadcasting also improved access to diverse media. Another amendment to the law requires broadcasters to publicize their revenue sources and track the potential spending of “political” money on media. The MSI panelists expressed the opinion that, overall, the media sector is less polarized and balance is more visible.

Reflecting these improvements, the overall MSI score went from 2.15 to 2.63—Georgia’s highest score in years. The climb is substantial enough to take Georgia’s media over a major threshold, landing solidly in the “near-sustainability” category. Business management continues to be a weakness, but that category has been some improvement as well (2.29 compared to 1.61). The advertising market and distribution channels have been de-monopolized, state control over editorial policy has loosened, and media professionals are participating increasingly in the decision-making process—all of which are stimulating adoption of new regulations. The regulations have fostered a healthier business environment in the media sector and created an impetus for greater pluralism and freedom of expression.

# GEORGIA at a glance

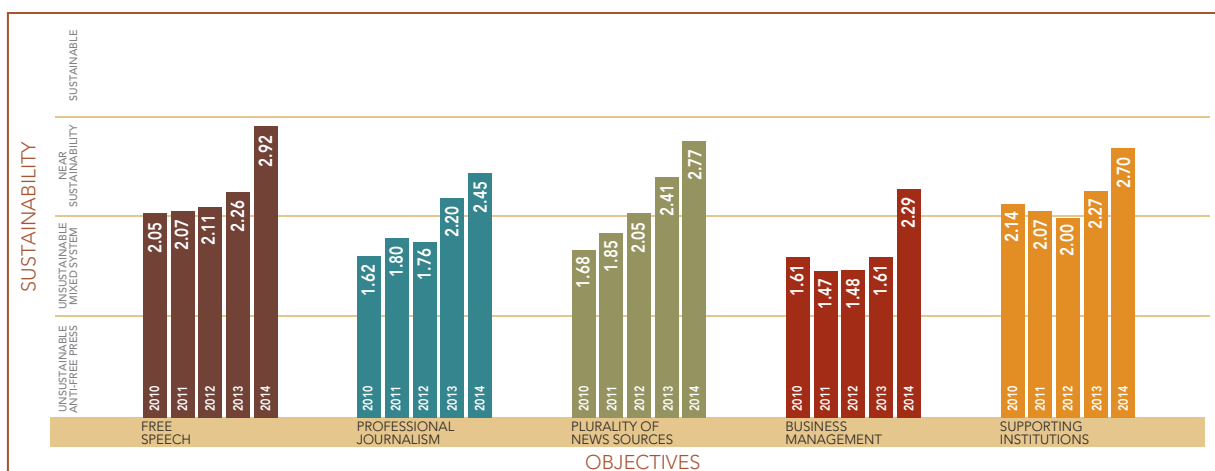
## GENERAL

- > Population: 4,935,880 (July 2014 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > Capital city: Tbilisi
- > Ethnic groups (% of population): Georgian 83.8%, Azeri 6.5%, Armenian 5.7%, Russian 1.5%, other 2.5% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > Religion (% of population): Orthodox Christian 83.9%, Muslim 9.9%, Armenian-Gregorian 3.9%, Catholic 0.8%, other 0.8%, none 0.7% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > Languages (% of population): Georgian 71% (official), Russian 9%, Armenian 7%, Azeri 6%, other 7% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > GNI (2012-Atlas): \$14.76 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2013)
- > GNI per capita (2012-PPP): \$ 5,770 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2013)
- > Literacy rate: 99.7% (male 99.8%, female 99.7 %) (2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > President or top authority: President Giorgi Margvelashvili (since October 27, 2013)

## MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > Number of print outlets, radio stations, television stations: Print: 48 newspapers, 18 magazines; Broadcast: 67 television (44 terrestrial, 23 satellite), 56 radio, 1 radio-television. (Media.ge)
- > Newspaper circulation statistics (total circulation and largest paper): *Rezonansi* (4,000–5,000 daily), *24 Saati* (4,500 daily), *Kviris Palitra* (55,000 weekly) (individual newspaper claims)
- > Broadcast ratings: Highest rated in Tbilisi six largest other cities are Rustavi2, 4.56%; Imedi, 3.51%; Maestro, 1.41% (TV MR GE, Licensee of AGB Nielsen Media Research)
- > Annual advertising revenue in the media sector: The estimated revenue of the television advertising market is approximately \$38 million (not including political and state ordered TV advertisements); unknown for print and radio (TV MR GE, Licensee of AGB Nielsen Media Research)
- > News agencies: info 9, Black Sea Press, Iveroni, NovostiGruzia, Sarke, Interpressnews, Iprinda, ItarTass, Kavkazpress, Media News, Prime News, Prime Time News, Pirveli, Georgian Business Consulting News, Georgian HotNews, GeoNews, Expressnews, World Sport, ambebi.ge, Business Press News, Droni.ge, epn.ge, Saqinform ([www.yellowpages.ge](http://www.yellowpages.ge))
- > Internet usage: 1,395,348 (Georgian National Communications Commission, November 2012)

## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: GEORGIA



## MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX 2014: OVERALL AVERAGE SCORES



### CHANGE SINCE 2013

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

**Unstable, 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.

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

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

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

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

## OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Georgia Objective Score: 2.92

Georgian media regulations are generally liberal, and the new government has taken steps to improve them further, panelists said. The score of 2.92 for this objective shows the momentum towards the more favorable media environment—free of state control—that seemed so distant in previous years.

As noted above, the groundbreaking changes to GPB mark great progress in this objective.<sup>1</sup> Zviad Koridze, a freelance journalist and board member of the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics (GCJE), co-authored the GPB bill. He said that the most significant achievement of the law is the quota system for the selection of the candidates, intended “to protect the interests of different political parties. In previous years, board members were nominated by the president to the parliament, which was electing candidates they favored by majority vote.”

According to the existing rules for selecting board members, the president chooses three candidates for each of the 15 seats on the board, and parliament approves one of those three candidates. The draft amendments envisage reducing the number of board members from the current

<sup>1</sup> “Parliament confirms amendments to Law on Broadcasting.” Civil.ge, June 1, 2013. <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=26136> (Accessed March 2014.)

### 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.

Most panelists said that one of GNCC’s most positive moves has been a series of round-table discussions held with media representatives, indicating the commission’s willingness to start the digitalization process.

15 to 9, allowing board members a six-year term, and excluding the president from the process of selecting board members. Three candidates will be selected through open competition, three by the parliamentary majority, and three by other members of the parliament. The amended bill went into effect on January 1, 2014, while the elections of the members of the board of trustees are ongoing.

An elections code amendment, improving media practices at voting sites, was another significant event of the year. The new law allows a journalist to stay on the voting site throughout the voting day, instead of being required to leave the site unless the journalist decides to stay inside the site for the entire day. The previous government had imposed this practice.

In 2013, Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC) renewed the discussion of the country’s digitalization of terrestrial broadcasting. The switchover was long kept secret by the previous government, according to Kavkasia TV Director Nino Jangirashvili. “All the talks were taking place behind the closed doors in Irakli Chikovani’s office [ex-head of GNCC],” she said. The switchover, initiated in 2006, is supposed to take place by June 2015.

Most panelists said that one of GNCC’s most positive moves has been a series of round-table discussions held with media representatives, indicating the commission’s willingness to start the digitalization process. However, some panelists that also represent broadcasters expressed concern that GNCC still has no implementation strategies. Natia Kuprashvili, director of the Georgian Regional Broadcasters Association, said that very little time is left, and that this will affect fairness with market competition and with distribution of frequencies. Mako Gogoberidze, coordinator of the Media Support Program at Open Society Georgia Foundation, agreed that the commission lacks capacity. “GNCC, when freed from political influence, acquired more freedom than it should have according to the law; that’s why it is unable to make any tangible decisions,” he said.

The panelists reported on recent court cases concerning the media. Ia Mamaladze, director of Guria News Publishing House, mentioned a court case won by the company. It sued

**Tsetskhlaze said that several freelancers were refused accreditation during the elections, on the basis that they were not affiliated with any of the registered media sources.**

for amendments to the Law on Political Parties and Political Coalitions, and as a result, media entities no longer must submit financial documents to the State Auditing Agency 24 hours after advertisement space is ordered. This amendment “eased the media’s way of making commercial deals for political advertising,” Mamaladze said.

Ekaterine Tsimakuridze, coordinator of the Georgian Media Legal Defense Center, brought up a contentious case regarding a public broadcaster’s illegal financing. Apparently, the government allocated GEL 120,000 (\$69,200) from government reserve funds to broadcast the presidential inauguration. Tsimakuridze explained, “According to the Georgian Law on Broadcasting, an administrative body is not eligible to purchase the service from the public broadcaster. The only exception is social advertising and spreading information significant to public interest. The only condition under which the budget of an administrative body can be used is when such a purchase is planned in advance. This did not occur in this case.”

Most panelists agreed that attacks on the press were much less prominent in 2013 compared with 2012, when frequently journalists were caught up in clashes and injured. However, some members of the press were intimidated and there were a number of attempts to blackmail media members last year. Panelists said that law enforcement has not paid significant attention to these cases, and many of the investigations from 2012 have stalled.

The government does not always uphold existing laws, as seen in some cases in which journalists were mistreated and authorities failed to safeguard privacy rights. For example, during a series of police raids in August 2013, police searched journalists of Tabula TV and destroyed all the footage that they found. Dima Avaliani, a journalist from Tabula magazine, stated that on the second day of the raids, Ministry of Interior authorities told publication staff that its investigation showed no evidence that the raids violated the law.

Coverage of the presidential election day did not proceed without incident, either. For instance, Gela Mtvlishvili, director of the Kakheti Information Center, recalled that while covering the elections, he was forcefully ejected from

the voting site on charges of photographing electoral lists. During the panel, Mtvlishvili claimed that he was keeping distance, as is written in the law, and authorities did not provide a proper explanation for his removal, nor did law enforcement perform a follow-up investigation of the case.

Commenting on Mtvlishvili’s experience, Koridze said, “This is an important case that confirms once again that there was no investigation, and this case never reached the court. This has been a constant topic of discussion for years. So far, none of the cases that explicitly tampered with journalists’ work or crimes against journalists have reached the courts. Even with the supposed end of political control over the judiciary, despite the supposed greater freedom of the courts, court hearings of journalist cases have still not taken place.”

In all, the Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association submitted 39 cases to the Chief Prosecutor’s Office. The majority of the cases were left over from before the 2012 parliamentary elections, Tsimakuridze said. “And in none of these cases are the investigations complete,” he added. “Thirteen of them were misclassified under an article different from the one that addresses purposeful interference with journalists’ work. This is the problem; the Chief Prosecutor’s Office was unable to make judgments due to its inability to classify the cases under the right article.”

The year 2012 ended with the detention of Nika Gvaramia, who is the director of Rustavi 2 TV and was a Saakashvili government minister until the end of 2009. Gvaramia was charged with providing assistance in bribery, money laundering, and false entrepreneurship. He was released on bail shortly thereafter, and after almost a year of investigation, he was acquitted in 2013.

In September 2013, right before the October presidential elections, the acting director of GPB canceled two political television talk shows. The talk show hosts, Eka Kvesitadze and David Paichadze (a journalist with Georgian Public Broadcaster Radio and an MSI panelist), were perceived to have close ties with the United National Movement. Many observers saw this decision as politically motivated and inappropriate in the run-up of elections, according to the anti-corruption watchdog Transparency International (TI).<sup>2</sup> It is noteworthy also that Paichadze was offered a contract at Public Broadcasting Radio.

Georgian law guarantees the confidentiality of media sources, but Tsimakuridze said that legislators are currently revising the criminal code to obligate journalists to unveil

<sup>2</sup> “Media environment ahead of the October presidential elections.” Transparency International, October 25, 2013. Available at: <http://transparency.ge/en/node/3501> (Accessed March 2014).



their sources if the cases they are dealing with are related to underage people.

Another significant case of 2013 involved the Internet leaking of a secretly recorded sex video featuring a journalist from Obieqtivi media outlet. The leak has since mounted concerns over privacy rights in the country. The journalist called for a press conference and said that the video was fabricated, and blamed top government officials for attempting to discredit him after he started accusing these officials of some corrupt deals. Consequently, the first deputy Interior Minister, Gela Khvedelidze, was fired on charge of breaching privacy. He was initially arrested and later released on bail.

In November 2013, the Georgian Ministry of Interior proposed amendments to Georgia's civil code that would criminalize a number of acts surrounding religion, from the desecration of religious institutions and symbols to publicly offending the feelings of the faithful.<sup>3</sup> The coverage of religious issues has long been a sensitive area that has challenged the freedom of expression in Georgia. In a joint statement, media and civil society organizations expressed their concern that "the bill is in direct conflict with the standards established by [The European Commission for Human Rights] and the Georgian Constitutional Court by placing restrictions of freedom of expression."<sup>4</sup> Tsimakuridze noted further that discussion of the article is temporarily on hold, as the Orthodox Church and the Ministry of Interior have failed to agree on a formulation of the article to include in the civil code.

Government wiretapping continues to be a cause of concern in Georgia. According to an open letter to the Georgian government from TI, the Georgian Ministry of Interior installed "black boxes" several years ago in the server infrastructure of all major telecommunication companies, with the capacity to monitor 21,000 cell phone numbers at a time.<sup>5</sup> Notably, in September 2013, the Ministry of Interior destroyed secret footage of the personal lives, including the sexual activity, of some people who were filmed secretly in hotel rooms and other locations between 2007 and July 2012. Allegedly, the footage was collected to possibly use

<sup>3</sup> "Georgia considers blasphemy ban." Eurasinet.org: November 5, 2013. Available at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/67725> (Accessed March 2014.)

<sup>4</sup> "Civil society organizations urge the parliament against adopting the law that imposes administrative liability for hurting religious sentiments." Georgian Young Lawyer's Association: Available at: <http://gyla.ge/eng/news?info=1807> (Accessed March 2014.)

<sup>5</sup> "Open letter to the Government of Georgia on unchecked telephone tapping made by the Ministry of Internal Affairs via mobile operators." Transparency International, May 29, 2013. Available at: <http://transparency.ge/en/post/general-announcement/open-letter-government-georgia-unchecked-telephone-tapping-made-ministry-i> (Accessed March 2014.)

to blackmail these individuals. A commission composed of representatives of state bodies, human rights groups, and journalists observed the destruction of the recordings.

Panelists agreed that licensing policies for print and broadcast media have become much freer from political pressure. In previous years, state agencies such as GNCC, the State Auditing Service, and the courts made decisions and enforced regulations on media-related laws that failed to consider the needs and concerns of media representatives.

The panelists did recount one troubling case in 2013. In a contentious decision, GNCC granted a broadcasting frequency to the Energy Group company, which is owned partially by the president of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Kakha Baindurashvili. Radio Hereti, an independent media outlet, was another contestant in the bid, but was denied the license in favor of Energy Group. "For a public body to award media contracts to organizations linked to government representatives is a blatant conflict of interest and a clear violation of Georgia's law on broadcasting. It also damages the independent media market in Georgia and undermines press freedom," said Jim Boumelha, president of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), in an IFJ announcement.<sup>6</sup>

Speculating on the case, Tsimakuridze said, "... perhaps GNCC did not investigate the case, or turned a blind eye to the matter. However, it is a fact that the license was awarded to a [group that] did not meet the basic requirements." The case is still under investigation.

Despite the licensing and registration mandated for cable channels, the government does not impose other significant entry requirements for the media market. Print media enjoy certain tax benefits; for example, paper, printing, distribution, and ad revenue are all free from VAT. The benefits also apply to mobile distributors. They are not required to have cash registers, and a physical body registered as a small entrepreneur pays 5 percent VAT instead of the regular 20 percent.

Most panelists agreed that the political will exists to enable access to public information within the new government. Several key tools have improved access by decentralizing the control of information sources. According to some panelists, state and public media relations offices have historically been in charge of enabling access to public information. "It was the same with every ministry during the previous

<sup>6</sup> "IFJ concerned about involvement of Georgian government officials in media contract awards." International Federation of Journalists: December 13, 2013. Available at: <http://www.ifj.org/en/articles/ifj-concerned-about-involvement-of-georgian-government-officials-in-media-contract-awards> (Accessed March 2014.)

Sensationalism is rampant in Georgian media, and online and print sources are more prone to careless attitudes. “There are many rumor-based reports in print and online media, including the frequent use of hate speech, but they are mostly left unchallenged,” Paichadze said.

government. Currently, the Ministry of Interior remains the least accessible,” said Jangirashvili.

But in 2011, Georgia joined the Open Government Partnership (OGP), a platform that seeks to make governments more transparent and responsive to their citizens. The rate and the quality of responses to public information requests improved after the 2012 parliamentary elections, according to [www.opendata.ge](http://www.opendata.ge), a project that monitors statistics of public information delivery. The project’s report states that initially, the state government and other municipal organizations responded to just over half of the requests they received. In the interim between the two elections, that number increased to 81 percent. Tsetskhladze and Tsimakuridze also noted that the government has enabled electronic requests for public information, which “saved time and money for the media.”

The government does not obstruct Internet access or use; in fact, state and public bodies and most politicians have embraced the use of the Internet and social media tools to share information. Kuprashvili said that even though online media outlets are required to obtain permission from GNCC, “nobody really controls them.” According to a Freedom House report,<sup>7</sup> “There is no evidence of online content being blocked in Georgia in 2012–2013.” The report also noted that the Internet continues to grow rapidly, particularly because of the rising need and interest of Georgians in surfing social-networking sites.

The Georgian government places no barriers on choosing journalism as a profession. However, it is difficult for freelancers and bloggers to obtain accreditation. Tsetskhladze said that several freelancers were refused accreditation during the elections, on the basis that they were not affiliated with any of the registered media sources.

<sup>7</sup> *Georgia: Freedom on the Net 2013*. Freedom House. Available at: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2013/georgia> (Accessed March 2014.)

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Georgia Objective Score: 2.45

In the panelists’ opinion, professionalism improved in 2013, at least in terms of balanced political coverage. The objective score of 2.45 showed a quite promising increase from the previous MSI report.

Most panelists agreed that the Georgian media sphere has a balance, but some said that the balance is more on paper than in practice. “We could say that there is a propensity in the media to strive for a formal balance. Someone has something to hide, knowing it is important news for the day, but they conceal it. It is either not part of the media outlet’s agenda or falls outside the interest of certain constituency groups,” Koridze suggested. Nino Zhizhilashvili, an anchor from Maestro TV, added that politics remains the top theme covered in news reports and talk shows.

Jangirashvili commented that television media have fewer problems regarding journalistic standards, because television media outlets have internal regulations. “And this is especially true now, since political control—or at least state control—has decreased by a considerable amount.”

Some lapses in professionalism persist, however. It is common for reporters to forgo checking their facts. For example, Imedi TV journalists came under criticism after they misspelled the name of the Catholic Church and the name of the church bishop in their coverage of a joint conference between the Georgian Patriarchy and Georgian Catholic Church.

### 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).

Reporters also neglect to check their sources and confirm their reliability, panelists stated. In September 2013 *Chronic* published two photos showing a person's amputated hand. The newspaper's editor-in-chief, Eliso Kiladze, initially said the hand belonged to an inmate, and that she received the photo from an unknown source. Following further investigation, law enforcers ruled out the links between the photo and a deceased inmate. In her reaction, published in *Liberali.ge*, Ia Antadze, director of Civic Development Institute, assessed the case as a harsh violation of media standards due to its use of unverified sources.

In another ethics case, Lasha Bakradze, chief of the Georgian Literature Museum, submitted a complaint to the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics regarding the violation of his right to privacy. He charged *Primetimenews.ge*, *News.ge*, and *Ambebi.ge* with posting a photo of his wife and child without his permission.

Sensationalism is rampant in Georgian media, and online and print sources are more prone to careless attitudes. "There are many rumor-based reports in print and online media, including the frequent use of hate speech, but they are mostly left unchallenged," Paichadze said.

According to *www.top.ge*, a website that monitors the ratings of Georgian print and online sources, Georgia has about 1,400 registered online media platforms. Anyone can start up an online media outlet. The panelists said that the overwhelming majority of outlets available on the Web neglect generally accepted standards, thus compromising the effectiveness of those who aspire to produce high-quality material.

Television outlets abide by the GNCC code of ethics, which provides very detailed guidelines on how balance and quality should be achieved and maintained. Some media sources, such as *Netgzeti.ge* and its regional newspaper, *Batumelebi*, have an internal code of ethics that editors and journalists follow closely, according to Tsetskhladze. The Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics aims to fill in the gaps for entities without such regulatory practices. However, its scope and actions are limited to its signatories, as it does not have any punitive power other than to revoke the membership of violators.

The panelists agreed that despite the aforementioned issues, some media sources have stayed sustainable over the years and have demonstrated dedication to good journalism. For example, *Liberali*, an online magazine that reports on hard news and openly criticizes conservative values, has preserved its reputation as one of the country's best publications since its launch in 2009. *Tabula*, *Netgazeti.ge*, *Civil.ge*,

Ghoghoberidze expressed the belief that censorship is rooted in inertia and not usually imposed on journalists and editors. "Nobody censors [journalists] directly, but they are so used to it that it has become a part of their character," he said.

Radio Free Europe's Georgian Service, and the regional newspaper *Batumelebi* also reflect credibility and adherence to standards. In 2013, *Netgazeti.ge* won the award for being the most informative news agency or online newspaper from the European Union Prize for Journalism.

Reports based on the monitoring of Georgian media (*Mediamonitor.ge*, *Transparency.ge*) before the 2013 presidential elections confirmed that the coverage of political candidates, candidates' campaigns, and political debates showed significant improvements in terms of journalist professionalism, objectivity of coverage, and balance of sources.

Despite the positive changes, reporting still can lack depth, according to Mamaladze. "It depends on the audience. If one follows several media sources, ultimately, it will be possible to get the news. However, this news is rarely exhaustive or analytical, which deprives the audience of receiving a complete and objective picture," he said.

Panelists mentioned that 2013 has been transitional from the standpoint of censorship and self-censorship. Still, Koridze said that regardless of the topic, from minorities to fundamental human rights issues, someone will always ask, "What will the church have to say about this?"

Nino Narimanishvili, editor-in-chief of *Samkhretis Karibche*, which is published in the minority-populated Akhaltsikhe region, gave an example of how her paper often stands alone in objective coverage. She said that if *Samkhretis Karibche* had not raised its voice to report on the recent clashes over the removal of a Muslim minaret, the events would not have appeared in Georgian media—and if they had appeared, the stories would have drawn different conclusions, she added.

The panelists discussed how the Georgian media covered the events of May 17, when an uncontrolled crowd composed of Orthodox priests and religious people disrupted and dispersed a peaceful demonstration designed to commemorate International Day against Homophobia.



Protestors carried posters with the words “Homosexuality is the Worst Sin” throughout Tbilisi’s Freedom Square.<sup>8</sup>

“Both freedom of expression and social norms [were] compromised,” Tsetskhladze said. “In compliance with existing social norms, many journalists and priests believed that these people did not have the right of expression. We could hear [the protestors] saying that we don’t have anything against these people, but we don’t want to see them in the streets.”

Jangirashvili added that the events that unfolded almost helped Kavkasia TV journalists to air critical coverage. “The aggressive behavior of clerics left no room for the usually careful coverage of the church,” she said.

Ghoghoberidze expressed the belief that censorship is rooted in inertia and not usually imposed on journalists and editors. “Nobody censors [journalists] directly, but they are so used to it that it has become a part of their character,” he said.

Just as in previous years, product placement practices are still widespread on television. Panelists said that it is well known that major television stations have price lists for commercial content packaged as news. “One can easily identify promo stories in the news, for which, in most cases, television companies are paid officially,” Zhizhilashvili said.

Wages for pay-for-print journalists are very uneven generally. There is a gap in the pay rates of print and broadcast media journalists and the monthly pay of regional media journalists, as well as those employed in the city. Bloggers are not paid for their work unless they freelance for larger outlets. However, the panelists said that they do not view pay as a cause of corruption. They blamed poor professional and ethical standards, which sometimes are influenced by the owners’ personal and political predispositions, as the primary impetuses of corruption.

Panelists mentioned that 2013 saw a burgeoning of political talk shows and Turkish television novellas, but opinions diverged on the issue of having a proportionate distribution between hard news and entertainment. According to Kuprashvili, “Since control over authorship rights has toughened, regional broadcasters were compelled to put aside unlicensed airing of entertainment and gear themselves towards the production of talk-shows and information programs.”

In 2013, Rustavi2, Maestro, and the new channel TV3 launched talk shows to cover political and public issues.

<sup>8</sup> “Georgia: Violent mob mars LGBT rally.” Eurasianet.org: May 17, 2013. Available at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/66983> (Accessed March 2014.)

Some panelists said that entertainment has higher ratings because Georgian viewership and large television companies (except Georgian Public Broadcaster) focus on profits and ratings in order to attract advertisements catered to their audiences’ programming interests. These programs include a substantial number of soap operas, sitcoms, and entertainment shows such as *Dancing with the Stars*, *Georgia’s Got Talent*, and *Night Show*.

Panelists noted that the quality of technical equipment in regional media outlets is very low. Kuprashvili and Narimanishvili mentioned that regional broadcasters and print outlets have difficulty updating their newsrooms because of poor financing.

Investigative journalism is almost imperceptible in Georgian media. Bearing in mind Georgian viewers’ tastes and preferences for infotainment, large media outlets choose to invest less money and resources into offerings that will not bring profits. A small investigative media outlet, Studio Monitor (<http://monitori.ge/>), periodically produces short investigative films that Maestro TV often airs. However, the films are not widely viewed by the public. Studio Monitor’s most recent film probed into the case of encroachment of the country’s protected areas by the “Industrialists” political party leader. Tsetskhladze and Paichadze said the impact of these films is difficult to measure, since they rarely translate into public discussion.

Niche journalism exists in print, online, and broadcasting media. Avaliani and Mtvilishvili said that despite the unfavorable effect that it can have on the quality of media products, media outlets are trying to reduce expenses by not employing individual journalists for each beat.

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Georgia Objective Score: 2.77

The overall plurality of news sources has increased notably since 2012, rising from 2.41 to 2.77. Since political forces have realigned and political pressure on media outlets is lifting, editorial and economic competition among media outlets has increased, thereby improving the coverage of local, national, and international news.

A TI report stated that a few months before the October 27 presidential elections, private media provided largely pluralistic coverage of the presidential candidates. “Candidates received by and large fair treatment and balanced coverage from major media outlets. At least for the time being, the Georgian media seem to have overcome

the extreme political polarization they showed in previous years,” the report stated.<sup>9</sup>

Georgia has many types of media outlets, including private, public, and community radio. Problems with accessibility still exist, given the poor infrastructure for Internet and that the cable carriers that air all television channels are not widely available in Georgian regions. Mtivlishvili mentioned that of Kakheti municipality’s 70,000 residents, roughly 5,000 households are cable subscribers. Fiber optic Internet is not widely available to people outside the capital or major Georgian cities; most people rely on modems.

Mariam Gersamia, a professor at Tbilisi State University, said that consumption of social media for information purposes has been increasing over the past several years. According to GNCC data, the number of registered mobile network subscribers reached 4.91 million in 2013, compared to 4.48 million in 2012 (including multiple subscriptions). Internet penetration increased from 3 to 7 percent in the regions and from 40 to 48 percent in the capital city, Kuprashvili said.

No laws restrict access to media, either domestic or international.

The Georgian Law on Broadcasting sets requirements and standards for the public broadcaster with regard to creating programs for different audiences. Despite attempts to provide pluralistic coverage, GPB has gone through a crisis

<sup>9</sup> Transparency International Georgia. “Media Environment Ahead of the October 27 Presidential Elections,” <http://transparency.ge/en/post/report/media-environment-ahead-october-27-presidential-elections> October 25, 2013.

#### 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.

According to Tsetskhladze, journalists search social media, especially Facebook, to find interesting story ideas. In some cases, journalists have admitted to conducting interviews via Facebook.

for all of 2013, according to TI: “The GPB’s board members and executive directors, just as their predecessors, have failed to build a strong, professional, and independent broadcaster that would be able to free itself from political interference and pursue a mission of public service.”<sup>10</sup>

The panelists agreed unanimously that this year has been especially difficult for GPB. Since the end of 2012, the new government has been facilitating the process of reforming GPB, and the new Law on Broadcasting was adopted. However, in the restructuring process, the board illegally fired GPB director Giorgi Baratashvili, Kuprashvili said. In March, the board dismissed Baratashvili for the first time. He was dismissed a second time in September, reportedly following statements from Khatuna Berdzenishvili, the former head of the news department, who Baratashvili fired. She accused the director general of exerting pressure on editorial staff to favorably cover the Georgian Dream party. In December 2013, Baratashvili won his case and was reinstated as GPB Director General.

During 2013, the board of trustees became “dysfunctional,” with 9 out of 15 board members resigning, according to the panelists. “All these factors directly affected its operation,” Kuprashvili emphasized, which prompted Gersamia to comment, “Nothing new is produced, and all programming comes from an archive.” Her statement is further supported by TI’s report, which noted that the financial crisis on top of the management crises before the elections compelled GPB to state that “it did not have the funds to launch new programs and will not be able to do so until early 2014.”

Another situation related to GPB was acting director Tamaz Tkemaladze’s refusal to air pre-election political advertisements from the United National Movement political party. “Advertising must not be counter-advertising,” Tkemaladze said, as quoted by Transparency International. “Instead, advertisements should say how much of a man the candidate is and what his accomplishments are. We will not broadcast advertisements that are solely based on what [the Georgian] Dream has not done. We will broadcast details of

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, “Media environment ahead of the October presidential elections.”

---

---

the party's plans, but advertisements about the fact that Shah Abbas [of Persia] invaded [Georgia] and that Erekle II was a bad king, will not be broadcasted." Nevertheless, GPB eventually aired the United National Movement advertisements.<sup>11</sup>

Kuprashvili agreed that the public broadcaster continues to fall short. "The activities of GPB are not only stalled but regressing, especially when it comes to its mission of filling the gaps that private television companies do not cover," he said.

A number of news agencies provide audio, video, print, and Internet content to the Georgian media. The news is used as either a background source or is published directly. The 2012 increase in the number of news agencies did not change in 2013. International agencies AFP, Reuters, and AP provide quality material that is used widely by Georgian media entities to cover world news. Panelists said that the visibility and credibility of some of the newly established agencies has yet to be determined.

The panelists agreed that even though some media sources produce original coverage, there is a widespread tendency to plagiarize. Narimanishvili said that she often finds the news items from *Samkhretis Karibche* in the newsreels of other news agencies. Mtvlishvili mentioned that many agencies are inclined to summarize and recreate already broadcasted news items instead of producing original material. "News agencies that deliver fact based reports are very rare, and it is not a secret that television media air information without performing background checks," Tsetskhladze said.

Facebook is becoming increasingly popular as a news source. All national media outlets maintain a Facebook page, where they upload stories and interact with their audiences. According to Tsetskhladze, journalists search social media, especially Facebook, to find interesting story ideas. In some cases, journalists have admitted to conducting interviews via Facebook.

The mysteries surrounding the ownership of national broadcasters Rustavi 2 and Imedi TV are no longer present, with the 2011 amendments to the Law on Broadcasting that toughened measures for ensuring media transparency. For example, offshore ownership of broadcasting is now banned and publicizing information regarding business ownership has become mandatory. Tsetskhladze said, "Along with these changes, the owners of media businesses changed, and we only learned who the new owners are." The owners of most media outlets are known publicly, but the panelists still had questions about some companies—for example, the newly launched network TV3.

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, "Media environment ahead of the October presidential elections."

In 2013, changes to the new amendments to the Law on Broadcasting arguably toughened requirements for broadcasters. One change requires media outlets to submit very detailed reports concerning their revenue sources. Particularly, broadcasting license holders have to submit annual reports summarizing their activities, reports on their sources of funding, and an audit letter to GNCC. The reports are subsequently posted on the broadcasters' websites. GNCC has to make public all advertisers that bought more than GEL 7,000 (\$4,000) of airtime in a quarter. Similarly, broadcasters have to disclose all sources of income and donors who contributed more than GEL 7,000 within a three-month period.

Some panelists expressed concern that law has forced too much transparency. Jangirashvili explained that if everyone else learns about her television company Kavkasia TV's sources of revenue, it will make the company less competitive on the market. Some panelists mentioned that the law allows for diverse interpretations. Shortly after the changes to the law, a group of broadcasters (Rustavi 2, Kavkasia TV, Maestro TV and Tabula TV) filed a case against GNCC at the Tbilisi City Court.<sup>12</sup>

Georgian media have no strategic approach to provide content reflecting different social issues. Panelists said that some outlets report in the languages of ethnic minorities, with content focusing on general coverage, including culture, politics, and even mundane events. But only Channel 1 and a handful of print and digital outlets provide some coverage of daily news in minority languages. *Samkhretis Karibche* offers issues in both Georgian and Armenian. However, Narimanishvili said it is common to hear local populations complaining about the lack of information available in their native language.

National media mostly cover national news, and regional media generally focus on local issues, catering to the needs of the local community. Narimanishvili and Mtvlishvili noted that it is difficult for regional media to send their reporters to the capital to cover national news, to receive commentary from central government officials, and to keep local correspondents. The proportion of national and local news coverage is 75 percent to 25 percent, respectively, the panelists estimated. Kuprashvili added that regional broadcasters' coverage has become less dependent on national broadcasters. "If in previous years, regional media was widely utilizing footage and commentaries from national television to cover national news, now they are producing their own material."

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, "Media environment ahead of the October presidential elections."

## OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Georgia Objective Score: 2.29

Business management remained the country's weakest area in 2013, but for the first time in a decade, the score for this objective went up to the "near sustainability" category, increasing from 1.61 to 2.29. Arguably, this is largely due to the de-monopolization of advertising—a shift that limited political and state money in the media—and the legislative amendments designed to improve the standards for establishing businesses. These tendencies emerged after the parliamentary elections of 2012 and strengthened in 2013, panelists said.

A Law on Broadcasting amendment, aimed at improving the financial transparency of broadcasters and in turn supporting the business environment, was one of the most important legislative acts of 2013. Still, Transparency International Georgia (TI Georgia) deemed that GNCC's first financial report, published for the third quarter of 2013, added "little to improve the transparency and accountability of broadcasters."<sup>13</sup> TI Georgia stated that the data that broadcasters have provided lacks clarity—often financing companies cannot be identified; advertising agencies are listed instead of advertisers; and in some cases, offshore companies are named, thus obscuring the company's ownership.<sup>14</sup>

But panelists said that conditions are still far fairer compared to previous years, due to this amendment plus

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, "The Georgian advertising market."

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, "The Georgian advertising market."

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

#### BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

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

"The previous legislation, which made it possible for broadcasters to hide information on ownership and financing sources, was more favorable to companies like TV3," said Koridze.

the restrictions set by the Law on Advertising regarding allocation of ad money. "The previous legislation, which made it possible for broadcasters to hide information on ownership and financing sources, was more favorable to companies like TV3," said Koridze. (TV3 is a company that the panel regards as suspicious in terms of its ownership and financing sources.) However, some panelists argued that the amendment might jeopardize their competitive edge by forcing them to reveal financial information.

Last year saw other steps toward improving the professional standards of media businesses. The Law on Advertising now requires broadcast media entities to conduct bookkeeping in line with international standards, though the new requirement does not apply to print and online media. Several panelists said that the regulation will encourage media outlets to rise to the next level of professional business conduct, but others disagreed, saying that the requirements will only burden their ways of doing business.

In 2013, an assessment of the Georgian television market stated that the disappearance of some players and the emergence of new ones (for example, Ivanishvili's TV 9 and its subsidiary Info 9) worked to increase competitiveness. TV9 was launched in 2012 before the parliamentary elections to provide opposition viewpoints in a market dominated by pro-government television stations. Later, in 2013, Ivanishvili claimed that the station was commercially unviable, saying that he could not find a buyer for the television and was forced to shut it down. The equipment that Channel 9 used previously is now used by GDS, an entertainment channel that belongs to Ivanishvili's son.

GDS was launched in 2012 as a satellite broadcaster and went terrestrial in 2013. In July 2013, the television company concluded its agreement with TV Mze on using its frequency. Today, GDS is the only media outlet that belongs to the family of the former Prime Minister, aside from its 10-percent stake in the Gori-based station Trialeti TV.<sup>15</sup>

TV3 (formerly Real TV) started broadcasting in mid-2013. The station is co-owned by Kakha Baindurashvili, a former minister of finance and current director of the Georgian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. TV3 uses the frequency

<sup>15</sup> <http://transparency.ge/en/node/3501>

---

---

of PIK TV, a Russian-language channel financed by GPB that was shut down soon after the parliamentary elections in 2012. TV3 focuses on current affairs, and it runs political talk shows and investigative journalism programs.

Community broadcasting is developed poorly in Georgia. GNCC research conducted in 2013 showed that there is a demand for community broadcasting,<sup>16</sup> and the commission made a decision to allocate community broadcast licenses in 2013. However, according to Tsimakuridze, the development of community broadcasters and their effective operation and sustainability “still remains an issue for the future.” Mtivlishvili agreed, adding, “It is impossible to become sustainable in two years or so.”

For the Georgian media in general, sustainability is not close to becoming a reality, due partly to the drastic changes in advertising practices. General Media, a de facto advertising monopoly, dominated two-thirds of advertising spending until it dissolved at the end of 2012. According to TI, this can be ascribed to a cascade of changes in media ownership following the parliamentary elections. Only Rustavi 2 remained willing to cooperate with some members of General Media after the elections. Now, several sales agencies work in the market.

Many panelists said that they regard these developments as positive steps in facilitating the creation of a competitive environment. However, Antadze pointed out some negative side effects. “Because of the monopolization of the advertising market, some television stations enjoyed favorable standing. Today, in the absence of a monopoly, it is still difficult [for them] to recover balance,” he said. For example, in previous years, the government gave financial amnesty to national television stations Rustavi 2 and Imedi TV. While other television stations were paying full taxes, those stations were free to invest the millions they saved in developing programming, upgrading technology, etc. which created a very unfair playing field, Antadze said.

How the advertising market will develop is also uncertain. General Media has been broken down into three companies, but as the founders of the three companies were the founders of General Media, Koridze said, “... let’s say that the assumed competition has begun.”

The panelists agreed that advertisers and companies now make decisions on their own. “If a business organization took ads to Maestro TV before, it would have been punished,” Koridze said. Today, as TI Georgia has reported, small opposition channels such as Maestro TV and Kavkasia TV are being supported. Immediately after the 2012

---

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.gncc.ge/index.php?lang\\_id=GEO&sec\\_id=110&info\\_id=114526](http://www.gncc.ge/index.php?lang_id=GEO&sec_id=110&info_id=114526)

parliamentary elections, opposition channels saw an increase in revenue, while big, formerly pro-government channels saw a decrease in revenue. The opposition channels did have a sharp decline in advertising in the first quarter of 2013; but as the TI report stated, “such growth in ad revenues [in opposition stations] was at least partly an emotional response to political developments, rather than a decision based on marketing assessments, broadcasters’ content, and ratings.”<sup>17</sup> This fluctuation in ad allocation may serve as an indicator of market driven decision-making, which had been absent for almost a decade in the Georgian media industry and advertising market.

The advertising market in 2012 totaled around \$54 million, meaning that it did not grow in comparison with the past. Predictions for 2013 remained uncertain at the time of the MSI panel. “I guess it will be less than in 2012,” Koridze said, adding that “...the budget of opposition channels will grow, but the total amount will shrink.”

The decrease in advertising-related spending in the first quarter of 2013 created the grounds for such predictions. “Numerous advertisers postponed their media purchases at the beginning of this year by several weeks, waiting for the dust in the broadcasting and advertising sector to settle after ownership, teams, strategies and price lists changed,” TI Georgia reported. “Only in 2014 might advertising spending grow—providing that local and foreign businesses regain their confidence and start investing.”<sup>18</sup>

The panelists noted that the market still struggles to break away from the “ugly habits” inherited from previous years. “Decisions on distributing ad money are not based on ratings or the reliability of the outlet,” said Mamaladze. “On one hand, the business sector prefers to take ads to the media loyal to the government—for instance, GDS and TV3. On the other hand, know-how of attracting diversified advertising does not exist, and if someone has such knowledge, nobody wants to learn of it. Making deals with governmental bodies or with political groups is easier and more familiar.”

The government distributes subsidies and advertising among media outlets in a more or less fair way. The panelists said that authorities still choose the medium by ratings and popularity, which affects regional and small media outlets.

Availability of reliable research data remains poor, which is a stubborn obstacle to attracting advertising for many media

---

<sup>17</sup> “The Georgian advertising market.” Transparency International Georgia: June 2013. Available at: [http://transparency.ge/sites/default/files/post\\_attachments/TI%20Georgia%20%20Advertising%20Market%20Report%202013%20\(English\)\\_0.pdf](http://transparency.ge/sites/default/files/post_attachments/TI%20Georgia%20%20Advertising%20Market%20Report%202013%20(English)_0.pdf) (Accessed March 2014.)

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, “Media environment ahead of the October presidential elections.”



outlets. Compared to 2012, audience measurement practice has not seen any significant changes in 2013. Nielsen's audience measurement data is available for national and Tbilisi-based television stations, but regional broadcasters are still left out. "We are simply not counted, reliably or unreliably," said Kuprashvili. While radio stations manage to arrange private research reports, they lack data collected by independent research companies. Absence of GRPs is an obstacle as for radio stations and regional broadcasters to attract advertising money, especially that of international companies. Classified ads remain the major source of income for regional television stations.

Websites still lack the professionalism to be effective tools for increasing data collection, data reliability, or, in turn, revenue. "There is no widely used and generally trusted framework to measure and compare user data of news and entertainment websites in Georgia," according to TI's Georgia 2013 report. Some panelists said that their companies use Google Analytics as a source for data collection on website traffic; other panelists could not name any measurement tool available in the market.

Adding to the problem, advertising agencies have limited understanding of new media sales. In 2012, online media remained in last place in terms of ad spending, with \$1.2 million in revenue and 2 percent of the total advertising market. According to Tsetskhladze, "Experts agree that quality online publications are mostly financed by grants, and consequently have very little advertising income. That is why they cannot be regarded as financially sustainable," she said. She noted also that the practice of launching media portals for political reasons diminished after the 2012 parliamentary elections. The panelists could not name any such case in the current year.

Panelists said that the print media sphere is viewed as the most vague in terms of data reliability. The practice of previous years remains unchanged—different circulation data are provided to tax authorities and sales houses. "No audit for calculating print media circulation exists, despite the fact that I have called for it for many years," Mamaladze said.

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Georgia Objective Score: 2.70

Overall, Objective 5 improved in 2013, in terms of support from the local and international NGO sectors. Other institutions have also demonstrated strong support for media. Some have become more functional than they were in previous years, and others remain inefficient.

As they reported in past studies, panelists said that the journalists' trade union has almost no influence on the media sector. Georgia has several associations, including the Georgian Regional Broadcasters' Association, the Media Advocacy Coalition, GCJE, and the Regional Association of Print Media. As noted in previous years, these organizations are mostly engaged in advocating for better policies and standards, promoting ethical norms of journalistic coverage, and ensuring the development of professional media in Georgia.

Job security for journalists remained problematic in 2013, but panelists said that addressing the issue is not in the scope of competence for these associations. For example, Paichadze mentioned that he was unable to find support from professional organizations when he was facing a harsh decision by the GPB directorate. (His contract was terminated prior to the due date, thus violating provisions in the Georgian labor code.)

GCJE is a grassroots organization established by 139 journalists in 2009. Currently its membership is 241.<sup>19</sup> Koridze, a GCJE board member, said that his organization is dealing with new territory related to website content. "In 2013, we have seen a growth in the number of complaints in the Ethics Charter [GCJE]. Most of these cases concern online media, and it is interesting in terms of establishing precedent."

According to information provided by the GCJE chair, nine complaints have been filed, citing violations of charter

<sup>19</sup> [http://qartia.org.ge/?page\\_id=6](http://qartia.org.ge/?page_id=6)

### 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.

---

principles during 2013. The GCJE council rejected four complaints and discussed five cases. The same year, the council approved a decree that allowed it to start publishing decisions on complaints filed against non-signee journalists. Koridze said that a high amount of public interest led GCJE to publicize four decisions in 2013. According to Tamar Rukhadze, the most striking case submitted to GCJE in 2013 was a complaint that the Ministry of Education and Science filed against GPB for revealing the details of the harassment of a disabled minor, thus violating the right of privacy.

One of the most active lobby groups for media interests is the Media Advocacy Coalition, a non-profit alliance of NGOs and associations. Its members including TI Georgia, Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, Civic Development Institute, Eurasia Partnership Foundation, NGO for Civil Society, Georgian Regional Media Association, Georgian Regional Broadcasters' Association, Regional Broadcasters' Network, GCJE, and Media Club. According to Tsimakuridze, the most momentous achievement of the coalition in 2013 was the landmark amendments to the Georgian Law on Broadcasting, as discussed throughout this MSI study.

Another media watchdog is the Media Legal Defense Center of the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, which offers legal counsel to media members and supports journalists by providing training programs and legal aid whenever necessary.

Many of the panelists said that educational programs targeting journalism in Georgia are unequal in terms of practical value. The quality of the labs where students develop their skills is very low in most universities. "In many cases, students graduate journalism programs with only theoretical knowledge," Tabagari said.

Panelists said that state-funded universities are reluctant to invest in upgrading media schools. "Only a few universities use new technologies in their instruction," Paichadze said. Gersamia added that "foreign embassies and international organizations also provide more support for media schools than the public universities do. Investments from them are significant."

In November 2013, a multimedia journalism center opened at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, with the support of the U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi. "The embassy financed the center to support the professional development of students of the field," said Richard Norland at the opening of the media center. "This program aims to help journalism students learn modern media production standards using multiple platforms." The media center is the second established with the support of the embassy in recent

years. The Multimedia Education Centre, MEC, launched in early 2012 by IREX/GMEDIA through USAID. It now serves several university journalism programs, including that of Caucasus School of Journalism and Media Management, Caucasus School of Media, Ilia University, and Radio Liberty by providing up-to-date multimedia technologies to improve instruction.

Gersamia, a professor at TSU, said that students will have editorial freedom and will be able to make decisions independently. "They even want to model GPB's board of directors, i.e. to create their own board which will be elected to learn what it is like to manage media," she commented. A multimedia web portal operates as a part of student media in the USAID G-Media supported Caucasus School of Journalism and Media Management.

Specialized training programs for media practitioners are offered mostly by international organizations such as IREX and the Open Society Foundation, or the schools that are supported by various foundation grants. These training programs are usually free of charge for participants, and in most cases, are open to all interested or qualified people. In 2013 alone, Media.ge announced more than 70 classes for media sector members. Most of the classes were organized and funded by international organizations. Some local schools also offer training programs in the media field, but they are commercialized courses. They include journalism training offered by Radio Freedom, or camera-operation classes offered by CSJMM.

In general, short courses and training classes are diversified in terms of the topics offered, but effectiveness is dependent on how targeted the material is to the media practitioners. Tsetskhladze said that sometimes classes cover a field without considering or inquiring about the needs or interests of particular media outlets. According to panelists, social/new media, multimedia journalism, and media management are the most in-demand topics, but an insufficient number of courses are offered in these areas.

With regard to payment for commercial short programs, media entities enlist the practice of barter deals. Occasionally, employers cover the cost of programs for their employees.

The panelists agreed that print media distribution channels are no longer monopolized. "The assumption that press boxes were politicized existed, but after the parliamentary elections such an assumption has disappeared," said Paichadze. But according to Mamaladze, some private money was invested in the Print Media Association, posing a threat to the existing distribution network. "The money that

entered the market almost ruined the distribution system—fixed salaries for distributors, costs of transportation, and for press stands placed a challenge that we could not overcome,” she said. She added that officials should be more careful when introducing such initiatives.

Concerning whether the media infrastructure meets the needs of citizens, the panelists pointed to the 2013 “must carry and must offer” principle, which stipulates that all cable operators must carry the signal of all licensed television channels in Georgia. This practice was normalized into the Law on Advertising two months prior to the parliamentary elections in 2012, and access to media in the country improved significantly as a result, panelists said. After the elections, “must carry and must offer” became a matter of choice for individual cable operators, as enforcement became lax.

In January 2013, before “must carry and must offer” became law, Obieqtivi TV sued cable provider Super TV for not carrying its signal. Super TV (formerly Aieti TV) justified its decision from a commercial standpoint, saying that it saw an absence of viewer demand. However, Ilia Chachibaia, Producer of Obieqtivi TV, charged that cable carriers remain under the control of government personnel that use their influence to limit free media outlets.<sup>20</sup> Super TV resumed broadcast of Obieqtivi TV soon after the lawsuit. Tabula TV, a pro-UNM channel, also sued Super TV for not carrying its signal. Super TV officials explained that Tabula TV did not provide the relevant technical facilities required by the regulations of GNCC, while Tabula TV refuted the claim.<sup>21</sup>

Commenting on these cases, Kuprashvili said, “This is not related to political interests. [It is] merely that the companies do not want to carry some broadcasters. We have the same problem in Telavi. A cable carrier has its own channel in Telavi and does not want to broadcast a competitor.”

The panelists agreed that overall access to media is no more politicized in 2013 than it has been in the past. They said that some rare instances of limitations, such as the cases of restricted access to Netgazeti.ge and Radio Liberty in Adjara governmental offices, are hard to label as deliberate decisions.

<sup>20</sup> [http://for.ge/view.php?for\\_id=20469&cat=3](http://for.ge/view.php?for_id=20469&cat=3)

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.media.ge/en/portal/news/301967/>

## List of Panel Participants

**Zviad Koridze**, freelance journalist, Tbilisi

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

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

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

**Maia Tabagari**, talk show producer, Imedi TV, Tbilisi

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

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

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

**Mako Gogoberidze**, coordinator, Media Support Program, Open Society Georgia Foundation, Tbilisi

**Mariam Gersamia**, professor, Journalism and Mass Communications Department, Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi

**David Paichadze**, journalist, Georgian Public Broadcaster; professor, Department of Journalism, Ilia University, Tbilisi

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

**Giorgi Meladze**, board member, Georgian Public Broadcaster, Tbilisi

**Nino Nakashidze**, head of communication and external affairs, Rustavi 2 TV, Tbilisi

**Ia Antadze**, chair, Civic Development Institute, Tbilisi

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

**Nino Zhizhilashvili**, journalist, Maestro TV; dean, School of Media, Caucasus University, Tbilisi

## Moderator and Author

**Ekaterina Basilaia**, project coordinator, Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi

*The panel discussion was convened on November 30, 2013.*