

Georgian Media in Transitional Period (2012-2014)



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Introduction

Law of Georgia on media is the best in the South Caucasus. Freedom of media, freedom of speech and expression is more or less guaranteed under the national legislation. However, practical implementation of the law is still a problem as well as professionalism and journalistic standards in media outlets.

2013 Report of Freedom House named Georgian media as partly free.¹ According to the report, government's influence over private media persisted during 2012 in the run-up to October parliamentary elections. However, there was some progress during the year on loosening media regulations and increasing access to a diversity of viewpoints, especially in the immediate pre-election period.

2012-2013 was particularly important period for Georgian media. 2012 Parliamentary Elections was distinguished with aggressive election campaign and of course, it was reflected on media coverage of the elections. As a result of active campaign of the civil society, principles of Must Offer and Must Carry went in force before 2012 Parliamentary Elections that played significant role to raise public awareness about pre-election process in the country and tribute to development of media in general. After 2012 Parliamentary Elections, new actors appeared in media. Part of them (TV 9) was soon closed; another part still continues functioning. 2013 Presidential Elections were conducted in relatively peaceful environment and media coverage was also balanced. Unlike 2012 Parliamentary Elections, during Presidential Elections media was less polarized and media outlets reported about election processes in more balanced and impartial manner.

Regardless recent positive changes, Georgian media still has many problems and challenges. Shortage of analytic publications, superficial coverage of facts, insufficient investigative journalism, negligence of ethic principles – it is incomplete list of problems in Georgian media.

2012 Parliamentary Elections and Media

2012 was important year for Georgian media. Before Parliamentary Elections, in parallel to very interesting and tense information campaign, TV 9 started operating; principles of Must Offer and Must Carry went in force after particular activity of civil society groups and it played significant role in increased public awareness about ongoing political events and ensured access to alternative information sources. Facts of oppression on journalists and interference in their professional activities were observed during pre-election period. Resolution of the Central

¹ <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2013/georgia#.Uz6eCvmSyvV>

Election Commission [CEC] caused particular discontent of media outlets, which significantly restricted work of media representatives in polling stations on the Parliamentary Election Day. During 2012 Parliamentary elections, media environment was more polarized than during 2013 Presidential Elections. Many international and local organizations noted in their reports that media remained divided among political lines.²

Polarization increased after new actor - TV 9 appeared in Georgian media. The TV 9, whose owner was spouse of Bidzina Ivanishvili, leader of the then opposition coalition, started broadcasting on May 1, 2012. The channel was broadcasted via TV-provider Global TV, which functioned as a cable provider. Owner of the Global TV was Bidzina Ivanishvili's brother.

Before Parliamentary Elections, operation of Must Carry and Must Offer principles was particularly important for free media environment. The rule obliged cable operators to air all broadcasters throughout Georgia including local, regional broadcasters, who already broadcasted in their coverage zones and TV-channels, which were available for at least 20% of Georgian population. On the other side, TV-Channels were obliged to provide cable operators with their signal.

It is noteworthy that Must Carry and Must Offer principles went in force as a result of particular struggle of the Georgian civil society. Several months before Parliamentary Elections, civil society organizations launched campaign This Affects You.³ One of their main requests and messages was introduction Must Carry and Must Offer principles. This very successful campaign was resumed in 2014 under a new message: "This Affects You – We Are Still Listened to". This time, the Campaign protests illegal secret surveillance of citizens' phone conversations.

Initially Must Carry and Must Offer principles went in force during pre-election period (throughout 60 days before the Election Day), but according to the 2013 amendments to the Law on Broadcasting, Must Carry and Must Offer principles are permanently obligatory for TV-providers.

It is noteworthy that Must Carry and Must Offer principles activated during 2012 parliamentary elections did not significantly improve access to alternative information sources for the population in the regions of Georgia because reportedly the cable operators mostly operate in big cities of Georgia. Satellite dishes were the only source to get alternative information for almost 50% of regional population.

To eradicate this problem, cable company Global TV started installment of satellite dishes in the regions. The company, owned by Bidzina Ivanishvili's brother, offered satellite dishes to the population for preferential installment – families had to pay price during next nine years.

² <http://www.osce.org/ka/odihr/elections/93622>

³ <http://esshengexeba.ge/>

That time government (United National Movement) sequestered satellite dishes of the Global TV in June-July 2012. The Chamber of Control (now State Audit Office) released statement, which read that free installment of satellite dishes for the subscribers of Global TV with Ivanishvili's finances contradicted the Law of Georgia on Funding Political Party and was bribery of voters. The Chamber of Control claimed it was distribution of 12 622 019 lari presents to voters. Initially Tbilisi City Court and then Appeal Court upheld the decision of the Chamber of Control and imposed fine of 63, 1 million lari on Ivanishvili.

In addition to that, in summer of 2012 TV Company Maestro launched new project "Maestro in Every Family" to widen their coverage. Maestro intended to install its satellite dishes in every region of Georgia but based on the solicitation of the Prosecutor's Office and court, on July 11, 2012, large amount of satellite dishes and other technical equipment of Maestro was arrested in the Custom Terminal.

According to the Prosecutor's Office statement, "In the frame of the probe launched on June 20, 2012 into the facts of voters' bribery through assigning free satellite dishes to them, it was concluded that based on the instructions of the Company Elita Burji's leaders, associated with the political organization Georgian Dream, TV Company Maestro imported large amount of satellite dishes to Georgia. Evidence collected by the investigation proves that dishes will be assigned to population for free according to the old scheme, which was used by Global TV recently."

Maestro management categorically denied their links with Elita Burji and claimed the equipment was purchased with financial resources of the TV-Company's owners.

As for the Election Day, international and local observation organizations detected several facts of interference in professional activities of journalists in polling stations. Mostly, those facts were caused by the CEC's new regulation about journalists' work in precincts. According to the CEC resolution, cameramen, as well as observers and representatives of political parties, could video-record polling process in precincts for no longer than 10 minutes; then they had to video-record the process from stationed video-camera which was to be located in the place indicated by the commission chairperson. If cameraman moved about the precinct or left the building, she/he lost right to continue video-recording in the same polling station.

Observers of the Human Rights Center reported that context of the CEC resolution was so obscure and unclear both for journalists and commission members that very often journalists' rights to cover polling procedures were breached; sometimes journalists wanted to vide-record prohibited places (like booth, registration list). It caused noise and disorder in polling stations and hindered ballot process in peaceful environment.

After 2012 elections, more freedom was introduced in media. During 2012 Presidential Elections, media environment was less divided among political lines than during Parliamentary Elections.

Media in Between Elections – Closure of TV 9, New TV-Channels

After 2012 Parliamentary Elections, after new political power Georgian Dream came in government, former Prime Minister and leader of the Georgian Dream Bidzina Ivanishvili announced that TV 9, owned by his spouse, created inconvenience for him and wanted to sell it out. However, the TV-Company was not sold. In August 2013, several months before Presidential Election, Ivanishvili said unless the TV 9 was sold before September 1, 2013, he would close it down. Several hours after his statement, personnel and management of the TV Company suspended broadcasting.

After TV 9 was closed, media and civil society representatives established Joint Stock Company Television, whose founders are Ia Antadze, head of Civil Development Institute, Vasil Maglaperidze, anchor of TV 9 and Tsothe Gamsakhurdia, son of ex-president Zviad Gamsakhurdia. The JSC Television asked Bidzina Ivanishvili to assign them equipment of TV 9; Prime Minister agreed and new television was about to launch broadcasting from 2014 though it has not started yet. New TV-Company GDS uses frequency of TV 9 now.

GDS is owned by Bera Ivanishvili, son of former PM Bidzina Ivanishvili. The TV-Company mostly offers entertainment programs. Initially, the channel was broadcasted by satellite company Global TV but since July 2013 it uses frequencies of the TV Company Mze and Pirveli Stereo and is available in Tbilisi and all big cities in Georgia.

After 2012 Parliamentary Elections, another new TV-Company TV 3 was created on the basis of the TV-Company Real TV. It was first aired in spring of 2013. TV 3 received radio-frequency license of the Real TV Georgia. The TV-Company is broadcasting via cable network.

15 days after the Parliamentary Elections family of late businessman Badri Patarkatsishvili returned TV Company Imedi. The TV-Company reported that old and new owners signed agreement and it was returned to initial owner. Agreement details are still unknown for the society.

2013 Presidential Elections and Media

In comparison to the 2012 Parliamentary Elections, pre-election campaign for 2013 Presidential Elections was conducted in peaceful environment; media was also less polarized and they covered pre-election campaign in more or less balanced and impartial manner. It was mainly caused by stabilized situation after 2012 Parliamentary Elections and lowered political temperature in the country. Before elections, unlike 2012 polls, no facts of oppression on journalists, interference in their professional activities or other were observed from the side of the government.

Early in September, 2013 Georgian Journalistic Ethic Charter and Slovakian media organization MEMO 98⁴ presented Media Code for Conduct in the pre-election period. The Code sets standards and principles for media during election period. It was created based on international documents and instruments and pays particular attention to the recommendations of the Council of Europe, OSCE and those international organizations, whose member Georgia is. The main purpose of accumulating those standards in one document was to assist journalists to improve professional standards during pre-election period. So far, five TV-Companies signed the Code (Georgian Public Broadcaster, Rustavi 2, Imedi, Maestro and Adjara TV). They voluntarily agreed to follow requirements of the Code.

Journalistic Ethic Charter carried out media monitoring of 2013 Presidential Elections. The prepared report reads that all five signatory TV-Companies followed main principles of the Code of Conduct. Only minor exclusions were observed, when broadcasters did not follow the principles.

Different media monitoring conducted in Georgia showed that media still had some problems in terms of professionalism when covering 2013 elections. For example, when covering the campaign, journalists just described the fact or quoted statements of the candidates. Analytic, in-depth analysis of the facts was not delivered. Also, except rare cases, journalists did not ask interesting, critical questions to the candidates and did not raise different interesting topics for discussion.

“Voters received diverse information about different candidates of the presidential elections, based on which they could make informed choice. However, in parallel to it, there was problem of insufficient number of analytic and in-depth TV programs, which could assist electorate to learn more about candidates and their programs. Media outlets spent most time of their news programs on the events organized by the government and two main political parties – United National Movement and Georgian Dream. News programs mostly highlighted election campaigns of the election subjects,” media monitoring report of the Journalistic Ethic Charter reads.⁵

During 2013 elections, Must Offer and Must Carry were still underway, which first went into force during 2012 Parliamentary Elections. Those principles promoted more public access to diverse information sources. Cable operators executed their obligations taken in 2012 and aired all general broadcasters in their networks. Regional population had access to more news channels and alternative information, than during 2012 elections. For example, Maestro and Tabula are available by ordinary antennas. Those TV-channels use frequencies of other channels, which had suspended broadcasting in the past. Signal of the TV 9, owned by former PM's family, was also available by ordinary antenna before it was closed (in August 2013).

⁴ <http://www.memo98.sk/en/>

⁵ <http://qartia.org.ge/?p=2196>

General trend, which has been observed in the transitional period in Georgian media environment, was weakening of politically motivated polarization in public broadcasters. Transparency International Georgia also spoke about it in their report.⁶ “Up until the 2012 elections, most major private TV stations were closely linked to political parties and received extensive direct or indirect financial support from political actors, both the ruling United National Movement and the Georgian Dream. In the pre-election period 2013, such close links between private broadcasters and parties were no longer apparent. While in previous years several TV newsrooms coordinated their reporting on politically sensitive issues, there now is editorial and economic competition between channels.”

Lately, situation about the company TV MR Georgia caused turmoil in Georgian society (TV MR Georgia measures ratings of Georgian TV-Companies). Revenue Service launched probe into the Company on February 24, 2014. After inspection, Audit Department of the Revenue Service requested the Company to provide them with the information about location of “people meters” but the company refused to release the information. The Company claimed if they had released the information about partner families, it could make their survey less trustworthy. As a result of disobedience to the request of the Revenue Service, the Company was fined with 800 lari. Part of nongovernmental organizations said the request of the Revenue Service was illegal and spread special joint statement with regard to the fact.⁷ NGOs state that “If any interested side, including the Government of Georgia, has access to the addresses of households, there is a risk that the rating results will be influenced or manipulated, including by households exercising self-censorship by avoiding to watch critical channels, fearing repercussions. Without measurement of audience, it is impossible to impartially measure the ratings of the TV-Companies and to provide advertisers with trustworthy ratings that will put television business at financial collapse,” the joint statement of civil society organizations reads.

Crisis at Georgian Public Broadcaster

In December of 2012, Director General of the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) Gia Chanturia, who was considered loyal to United National Movement, resigned from the position. On December 26, the Board of Trustees elected Giorgi Baratashvili to the position of the Director General. Before, Baratashvili headed Technical Department at the GPB.

After election, Baratashvili was twice fired from work. First, Board of Trustees fired him in March of 2013. Several days before that, Baratashvili fired head of Public Political Department at the GPB Khatuna Berdzenishvili. After dismissal Berdzenishvili accused Baratashvili of

⁶ <http://transparency.ge/en/post/report/media-environment-ahead-october-27-presidential-elections>

⁷ <http://transparency.ge/en/post/general-announcement/revenue-service-involves-court-seeking-obtain-household-addresses-tv-ratings-firm>

oppression and said her dismissal was politically motivated decision. Berdzenishvili claimed Baratashvili had offered her money to stop preparation critical reportages about the government.⁸ Former head of the Public-Political Department was not going to surrender and appealed to the Board of Trustees.

The Board declared distrust to the Director General and fired him. Giorgi Bakradze was appointed as an interim director general. The protocol of the Board reads that decision was made to protect the GPB from political influence and loss of reputation; with the decision, the Board tried to implement its duties.

Baratashvili appealed to court to defend his rights. The court found the decision of board illegal and restored Baratashvili to the position of general director.

In several months after Baratashvili was restored to the position of general director, the board fired him second time. The board stated that the reason of this decision was that Baratashvili did not provide exhaustive information regarding the budget and priorities of Public Broadcaster. It is interesting that on September 1st of 2013, office terms of 4 out of 13 members of board expired. However, the board managed to collect enough votes to dismiss Baratashvili from job. Remaining 9 members of board unanimously supported his dismissal. The board approved Tamaz Tkemaladze to the position of general director. The board supported this decision by 8 votes. Considering that number of people in the board was not enough to appoint general director, Tkemaladze was appointed to the position of acting general director. Baratashvili appealed to court again with the request of restoration to the job.

Soon after appointment, Tkemaladze's decisions were met with controversy. One month before elections, he closed political talk-shows of Eka Kvesitadze and David Paichadze. It should be noted that both journalists were perceived to be loyal to UNM and critical towards Georgian Dream. UNM and certain NGOs found this decision to be politically motivated.

Besides, Tkemaladze refused to air political advertisements of UNM which criticized Georgian Dream. He stated that "advertisement must not include anti-advertising. They should say what they did and who they are and not what Georgian Dream did not do."

The crisis escalated after two out of 9 left members left the board. They stated that they were under political pressure without clearly indicating who pressured them. As a result, seven members remained in the board thus the board no longer had a necessary quorum to appoint new general director or make financial decisions as decision-making needed 8 votes. The board lost its functions and became symbolic body.

⁸ <http://old.media.ge/stories/khatunaberdzenishvilimi>

This controversy was followed with financial problems. Public Broadcaster was unable to prepare new programs as there was not sufficient money in the budget. Thus, during the pre-election period, the TV Company could not manage to allocate relevant resources and prepare diverse programs for electoral candidates and cover their programs comprehensively.

At the same time, the trials in the case of Giorgi Baratashvili's second dismissal were underway. Court made decision to restore him to the position of general director of Public Broadcaster second time in December of 2013.⁹

It should be noted that shortly after being dismissed from her job, Khatuna Berdzenishvili was appointed to the position of head of Krtsanisi precinct by mayor of Tbilisi and head of UNM Tbilisi Office, Gigi Ugulava.

Besides, there were numerous changes made to Georgian Law on Broadcasting. Former President Saakashvili vetoed the initial version. Parliament overcame veto in July of 2013. According to new provisions, the rule of formation of board was changed as well as the status of Adjara television. The number of board members decreased from 15 to 9. The maximum term of mandate became 6 years. According to new changes, President no longer participated in the process of selecting board members.

According to new provisions, parliamentary majority introduces three candidates for board membership, other members of Parliament also introduce 3 candidates, two members will be introduced by Public Defender; for one left spot, candidate will be presented by Supreme Council of Autonomous Republic of Adjara.

Though the new law already took force, the board is still not formed. At the time of writing this report, the Parliament has approved only four members of board – candidates presented by Public Defender of Georgia – Marine Muskhelishvili and Lela Gaprindashvili, candidate presented by parliamentary minority – Ketevan Mskhiladze and candidate presented by parliamentary majority – Natela Sakhokia. During previous contest, parliamentary majority did not fully use its quota and failed to name two more candidates for the vacant positions of board members. The candidate presented by Supreme Council of Autonomous Republic of Adjara did not receive necessary number of votes either. After the first contest, 5 positions became vacant in 9-member board.

According to existing legislation, the board does not have authority until at least 7 members are appointed. Thus, currently the board is unable to determine the program priorities and implement its obligations.

⁹ <http://www.media.ge/ge/portal/news/301954/>

The head of Parliament of Georgia, David Usupashvili announced contest for 5 vacant positions for membership of Public Broadcaster's board. Usupashvili made decision to announce contest on March 11st of 2014. The process of selecting candidates is still ongoing.

Georgian National Communication Commission

Georgian National Communication Commission (GNCC) was founded according to Georgian Law on Communication and Post adopted on July 23rd of 1999. According to the law, Commission is legal entity of public law, a permanent independent state body. It is not governed by any state agency and is not financed from the budget. Its income source is made up by regulation fees of authorized entities and licensed organizations. National Communication Commission regulates telecommunication and broadcasting media throughout the country and issues licenses.

After 2012 Parliamentary Elections, many questions and doubts were raised regarding work of GNCC. The commission was accused of being politically influenced. The head of the commission was criticized for owning share in TV Company which produced advertisements and placed them in broadcasting media.

In May of 2013, temporary investigation commission was created in Parliament for studying the work of GNCC. The members of the commission were members of parliamentary majority – Tamar Kordzaia, Ani Mirotadze, Erekle Tripolski, Irakli Chikovani, Paata Kiknavelidze and members of parliamentary minority – Sergo Khabuliani, Paata Lezhava, Levan Bezhashvili, Giorgi Karbelashvili, Guram Misabishvili, Revaz Shavlokhvili, Zurab Chilingarashvili, David Sakvarelidze. The commission was headed by the member of parliamentary majority – Tina Khidasheli. Commission finished working for the end of October of 2013. According to their conclusion, GNCC inadequately spent the budget. The conclusion states that approximately 63% of the whole budget of GNCC was allocated for salaries, 46% of which was spent on the salaries of five members of commission. The honorarium for each member of commission was approximately 13 thousand GEL every month. According to the conclusion of parliamentary commission, because of inadequate budget politics GNCC cannot implement one of its main functions – monitoring of companies which hold broadcasting licenses.

As for the head of commission, Irakli Chikovani who was in charge of the commission since 2009, after 2012 parliamentary elections, he took 3-month vacation and left Georgia. Then he wrote resignation letter and left the job. There were constant accusations against him that he had certain business interests which caused conflict of interest and hindered his work as a head of the commission. Before being chosen as a member of commission, Irakli Chikovani was the director and shareholder of TV Company Rustavi 2. While working in the Commission, he was a founder and co-owner of advertisement company MagiStyle. This company was regulated by the Commission. This caused conflict of interests according to majority of civil society.

One more accusation against Chikovani was imposed by his former employee Giorgi Ratishvili on November 6th of 2013. On Maestro TV, he revealed audio recordings of Irakli Chikovani and accused him of cover-up of wrongdoings committed by major internet service provider in Georgia - Caucasus Online. In the audio-recording, Chikovani offered representatives of Caucasus Online to sign agreement by old date. Chikovani denied all accusations including problem of conflict of interest.

After resignation of Chikovani, ex-President Saakashvili appointed Karlo Kvitaishvili to the position of acting head of GNCC. The issue of his impeachment was soon raised in the Parliament. Members of Parliament argued that according to Georgian Law on Broadcasting, the member of GNCC cannot simultaneously be member of a political party. According to parliamentary majority, Kvitaishvili was a representative of UNM in Central Election Commission alongside being a member of GNCC. Kvitaishvili stated that he has never been a member of UNM and that he just represented them in Central Election Commission. On November 1st of 2013, Georgian Parliament supported his resignation with 94 unanimous votes.

According to Georgian Law on Broadcasting, in case of resignation of acting head of GNCC, the oldest member of commission is appointed to the position of acting head. Thus, Akaki Sikharulidze, oldest member of commission was appointed as acting head of the commission.

On November 20th of 2013, President Giorgi Margvelashvili announced a contest for the positions of members of GNCC. The process is still ongoing.

Transition to Digital Broadcasting

According to the agreement made with International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and European Union (EU) in 2006, Georgia became obliged to finish process of transition to digital broadcasting by June of 2015. Georgian TV channels are currently broadcasting through analog signal. This frequency is restricted and is not sufficient. That is why it was necessary to switch to digital broadcasting which gives possibility for sharing more channels as well as increasing quality of image and sound. Most part of Europe has already completed this process. This is complex process which sometimes takes quite long. In USA, it took 15 years to make transition to digital broadcasting. However, in some countries, i.e. in Bulgaria, it was possible to complete in 2 years.

Though 8 years have passed since Georgia took on obligation to make transition to digital broadcasting, it did not have any legislative framework which would govern this process. The responsible body for elaborating the strategy is the Ministry of Economics and Sustainable Development. However, it has not presented any strategy for years. The steps have been taken in this direction in 2014. On February 7th, Georgian government adopted strategy for action and recommendations for transition to digital broadcasting.

According to this strategy, Georgia will plant US approach according to which, regional and local media will be able to broadcast with relatively low-level devices that will significantly lighten their financial state and transition to digital broadcasting will not become financial burden for them. In order to be able to broadcast digitally, TV Company must be equipped with special transmitter. If the TV Company is unable to broadcast its production by own, then it will remain to be just a content producer and the production will be disseminated by another provider.

Though positive steps have been taken by the government, certain problems still remain which hinder process of transition to digital broadcasting. Material and informational readiness of society remains to be a problem. Most part of society does not have any information regarding this process. Besides, part of population might have to purchase special devices to be able to receive and watch TV channels after TV becomes "digitalized" in 2015. The viewers who receive broadcasting signal through external, inside or general antennas will face the major change. According to latest statistics, such viewers amount to 45.9% of Georgian population majority of who live in the villages. Those viewers, who receive broadcasting signal through cable networks or satellites, will not have to purchase special device for receiving signal. Cable companies ensure that the signal is transitioned to digital form. However, they might increase the prices afterwards. We do not have any specific information about this yet. Increasing or maintaining prices will depend on the expenditure of concrete provider in the process of transition to digital broadcasting.

As for financial part, according to the strategy introduced by the state of Georgia, the state ensures free distribution of receivers of digital signal for socially vulnerable families. However, the problem in this case is that the families which belong to this category do not have TV at all or have too old TV which will not work for receiving digital signal. Thus, for these families, distribution of receivers of digital signal will not mean anything. It is essential that state provides them other essential equipments with minimal quality.

Ethics and Self-Regulation

Main self-regulatory mechanism for ethics of journalism is Charter of Journalistic Ethics which has been founded in 2009 and its 11 principles are signed by approximately 250 active journalists, editors and producers of TV and radio, press and online media. These 11 principles are based on article 10 of European Convention of Human Rights and Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists recognized by International Federation of Journalists. These principles are main standards which must be abided by individuals working in media sphere. By signing the charter, the journalists are taking obligation that they will abide these principles. If any citizen thinks that a journalist violated these principles, he/she can make complaint in the board of the Charter which will study the case and will make conclusions. It should be noted that the Charter does not monitor whether the signatory journalists are abiding its principles. It

reacts to the complaints made by the citizens and then starts to study the case and make conclusions. Up until 2014, the board heard the cases of only those journalists who were signatories of the Charter. Since 2014, the Charter decided to expand its mandate after public polls revealed this need. Now it also hears the cases of those journalists who are not the signatories of Charter. The board consists of 9 members who are selected by member journalists.

Besides, Charter of Journalistic Ethics periodically conducts various thematic media monitoring regarding the electoral processes in the media, issues of children, coverage of judicial issues. The group of media monitoring observes media outlets, submits complaints to self-regulatory bodies and makes public announcements in case it discovers violations. The final results, negative and positive tendencies revealed throughout the monitoring and recommendations are presented in final and intermediate reports.

Except for Charter of Journalistic Ethics, broadcasters have their own self-regulatory bodies. Broadcasters are obliged to create self-regulatory mechanisms by Georgian Law on Broadcasting. If citizen considers that his/her right has been violated by the material published by the broadcaster, he/she can make a complaint in self-regulatory body. The problem is that this person must be "interested individual" according to law. This means that the aired material must directly touch the individual in question or his/her family. This provision still raises questions as it does not clearly determine what "interested individual" is. There are cases when self-regulatory body does not admit complaint as it does not acknowledge applicant to be "interested individual". For instance, there have been numerous cases when the complaints of NGOs working on rights of children have been rejected as they were not considered to be "interested individuals".

Conclusion and Recommendations

Despite numerous problems enumerated above, it should be noted that in recent years media environment is less polarized, is more free and pluralistic. Compared to previous years, majority of population has better access to various sources of information. However, despite certain positive changes, professionalism, financial transparency and political interests in media business still remain to be problematic. Crisis started in Public Broadcaster during recent years is still ongoing. As a result of this crisis, the Public Broadcaster has no acting board. On March 26th of 2014, deadline for receiving applications for additional contest for membership of board has ended. As we noted above, it became necessary to announce contest for this position second time as Georgian parliament approved only 4 members of board for 9 vacant places after the first contest. It is very important to ensure comprehensive formation of board to end the crisis and enable Public Broadcaster to comprehensively continue its work.

Recommendations:

- Provide comprehensive information to public regarding financial transparency of media organization and media ownership;
- Take faster and more effective steps in the process of transition to digital broadcasting; develop mechanisms to prevent monopolies in this sphere, inform society regarding digital broadcasting and more actively involve civil sector in this process;
- Take effective steps to solve problems existing in Public Broadcaster – to complete formation of board in shortest terms to enable Public Broadcaster to function comprehensively;
- To enact more effective self-regulatory mechanisms in order to comply with standards of journalistic ethics;
- To make amendments in the Code of Conduct of Broadcasters which will clearly determine vague term of “interested individual”.