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Introduction

In April 2014, Transparency International (TI) Georgia presented a detailed study of the ownership of media outlets that have national coverage or reach a large segment of the population¹. The report also discussed background, connections and corporate interests of media owners.

Later, in July 2014, TI Georgia presented a second report that examined the ownership of regional media outlets, their role and funding². Regional media outlets play an important role in shaping discussions in Georgia's towns and villages. Their significance has further increased after the local self-governance reform, as a result of which mayors in 12 cities were directly elected.

This report seeks to, on the one hand, update information regarding the ownership of major media outlets and demonstrate changes that have occurred with these outlets, and, on the other hand, focus on the ownership issues of online media publishers. To date, no thorough research into Georgian online media has been produced, while the impact of news websites on the public opinion grows as internet penetration increases³.

This report is based on public records and information provided by media outlets. In order to receive detailed information, TI Georgia conducted dozens of interviews with the representatives of news websites.

As no single unified and trustworthy source for the ratings of online resources exists, websites included in this report were selected based on several criteria. All selected websites cover political news, extensively use social networks to disseminate news or consistently had up to 500 unique daily visitors in May-June 2015, according to information available via the web analytics website <http://top.ge/>.

¹ Who owns Georgia's media: Power networks and corporate relationships behind Georgian media outlets, TI Georgia, April 2014. <http://www.transparency.ge/en/post/report/who-owns-georgian-media-power-networks-and-corporate-relationships>

² Who owns regional media: TI Georgia releases a new report, TI Georgia, July 2014. <http://www.transparency.ge/en/post/report/report-who-owns-regional-media>

³ According to the Caucasus Barometer study, number of internet users increased from 32% to 48% between 2009-2013

Key findings

- The ownership of Georgian media outlets is transparent. There have not been any significant changes in ownership of major media outlets throughout the last year. None of the major media outlets are directly owned by a political group.
- The legal battle over the ownership of Rustavi 2 is, most likely, politically motivated. This could adversely impact media freedom in Georgia.
- There have been significant personnel changes at several major media companies in recent months. This has affected the content of broadcasting. In a number of instances, owners were suspected of interference in the editorial policies of the broadcasters, undermining media freedom.
- Several cable and internet outlets appear to be owned by anti-Western and religious organizations. Their declared revenue is rather small, making it unclear what resources these channels have been using to be able to broadcast.
- Several media outlet groups, united by their political preferences, can be differentiated. Some of these websites operate without a stable revenue or permanent employees, raising questions about their independence.

Recommendations

- Government representatives should refrain from making political statements concerning Rustavi 2 and its ownership, as it could influence on-going litigation.
- The owners of the media outlets serve as important guarantors of media independence, along with the government. It is important that their actions do not influence the editorial policies of media outlets.
- Even though transparency regulations do not apply to online media, to increase credibility they should publish detailed information on their owners and the individuals responsible for content.

Ownership transparency

Georgian media ownership is mostly transparent, and the situation has not changed since 2014. Despite the fact that owners of several media outlets had, or to date have, connections with the ruling Georgian Dream coalition, or with the opposition United National Movement party, according on the most recent data, none of the active political figures own or finance any of the major outlets. However, in regards to the issues of ownership of a major broadcaster, the lawsuit of businessman Kibar Khalvashi, based on which the court ordered freeze on assets and property of the TV station Rustavi 2 and limited the powers of the company directors, is noteworthy⁴.

Concerning online media, ownership transparency requirements do not apply to these outlets, and, therefore, citizens do not have information about such websites' owners. Dozens of interviews conducted by TI Georgia and systematic observation of the news websites in May and June 2015 demonstrated that despite diversity of Georgian online media, in recent years several groups of media outlets, united around common political preferences, have been formed. These groups mostly work in a coordinated manner and actively use social media to disseminate their news. These types of publishers make it increasingly difficult for independent and unbiased online media outlets to deliver information that is verified and of high journalistic standards to their readers and thus to attract advertisement. According to the media monitoring report, conducted with the support of the European Union and the UNDP, during the last several pre-election periods, some of the online media outlets were biased⁵.

In most countries online media is not subject to any legal regulation. Taking this into account, it is important that representatives of online media themselves provide exhaustive information about their activities to their readers, in order to ensure high credibility of the materials they publish. In this regard, news websites are encouraged to include the following:

- information regarding owners and editors on the website, along with a code of ethics of the publisher and other documents regulating journalistic activities;
- links to sources used, when such exist;
- detailed contact information; fast and effective mechanism of communication with users.

⁴ Rustavi 2, Registry of Commercial and Noncommercial Legal Entities [in Georgian]: <https://goo.gl/E82K3d>

⁵ Results of Media Monitoring of 2014 Local Government Elections, April 15 - June 30, Project "Professional Media for Elections", CRRC Georgia, <http://www.mediamonitor.ge/files/Final%20Eng%20MM%20Publication%202014.pdf>

Online media

According to the informative-analytical web portal of Georgian National Communications Commission, there are 564 357 internet users registered in Georgia today⁶. Internet Penetration in Georgia is increased every day. Currently, the Georgian government is working on a project that would make broadband internet available in every populated area of Georgia⁷.

According to a study conducted in spring 2015 by TI Georgia and Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC), the number of daily internet users had increased by 4% compared to 2013, however, 46% of the population still does not use internet⁸. Computer literacy and access to the internet is much lower in the population living in villages and among citizens over 56 years old.

Georgians most often use the internet for social networks (75%) or to search for information (41%). Furthermore, users often visit social networks to receive information. According to a public opinion poll conducted by National Democracy Institute, the internet is the second most important source of information about current events for Georgians⁹.

There are several explanations for the increase in the number of news websites in Georgia. Licensing regulations do not apply to online media, thus the market entry barriers are low. Furthermore, production costs in online media are much lower than in broadcasting or print media, decreasing dependence on external sponsors. Consequently, there are several online publishers on the market that offer their readers valuable journalistic material. Among such publishers are regional online media outlets, which cover current events in their respective regions. Several such news outlets are important sources of information in those regions.

However, in recent years, the number of online outlets associated with various political groups has increased significantly. Apart from a large number of such web resources and online media outlets, it is important to note their interconnection. Some news websites are informally connected with each other and cover some topics in a coordinated manner.

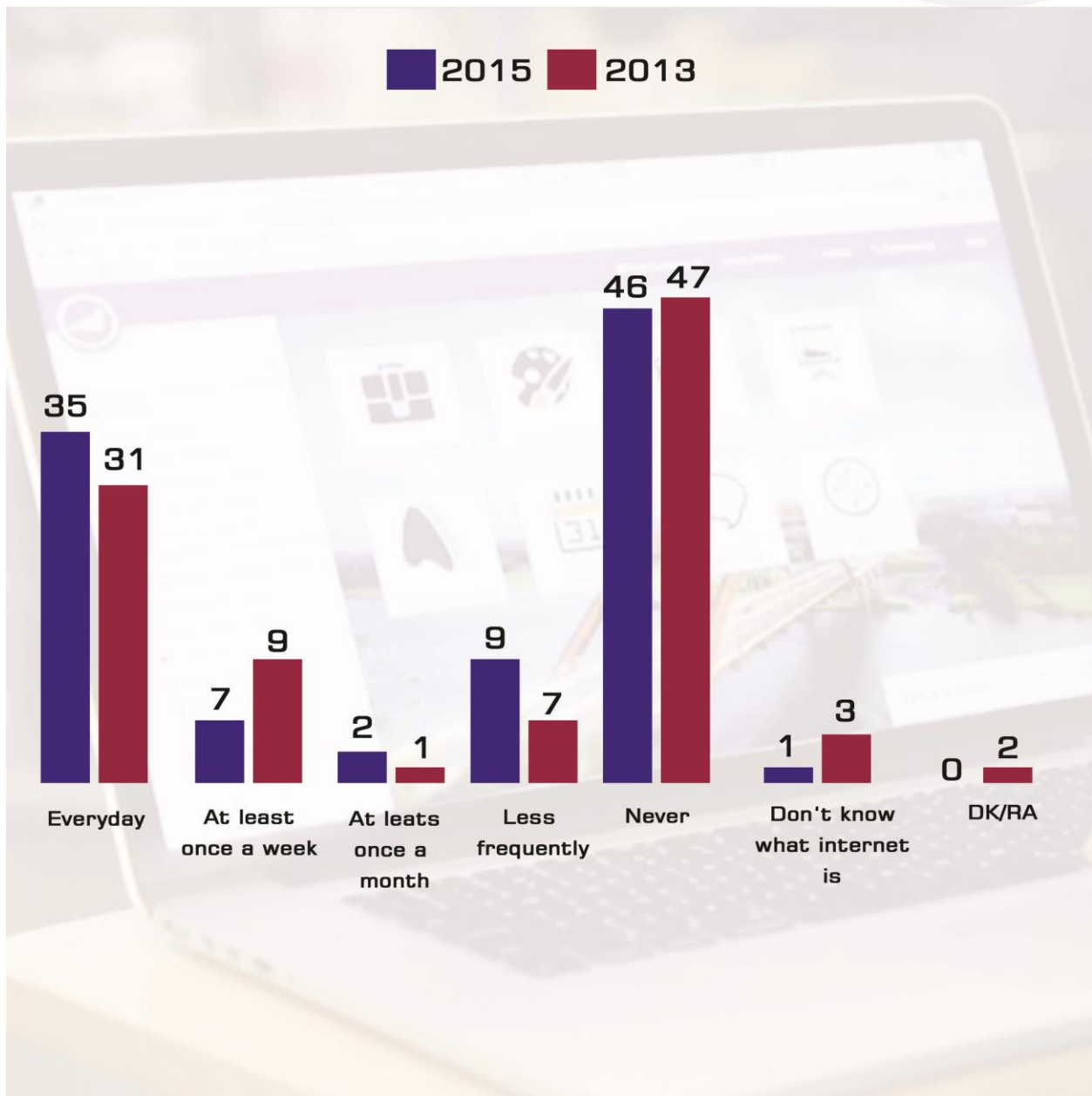
⁶ Analytical portal of Georgian National Communications Commission, <http://analytics.gncc.ge/en/>

⁷ Ivanishvili's Qartu to finance project for universal access to broadband internet [in Georgian], <http://www.netgazeti.ge/GE/105/Technology/48920/>

⁸ The public expects more coverage of social issues from media <http://www.transparency.ge/en/blog/public-expects-more-coverage-social-issues-media>

⁹ Public Attitudes in Georgia, April 2015, NDI and CRRC, [https://www.ndi.org/files/NDI%20Georgia April%202015%20Poll Public%20Issues ENG VF 0.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/files/NDI%20Georgia%20April%202015%20Poll%20Public%20Issues%20ENG%20VF%200.pdf)

How often do you use the internet? (%)



Transparency International Georgia, Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC)
– Public Opinion Survey, 2015

Advertising and financial sustainability of online news websites

It is quite difficult to determine the most popular websites in the country. There is no trustworthy or well-known source, based on which usage of information and entertainment websites in Georgian can be ranked. Top.ge observes traffic to a large number of Georgian websites, however the administrators of the websites interviewed by TI Georgia, do not fully trust Top.ge data.

Advertisers in Georgia, usually rely on their intuition, rather than on market study or statistics on users. In such cases, advertising content is not curated to the preferences of the website audience. The lack of information on users of Georgian websites makes it hard for advertisers to evaluate the success of their advertising campaigns. For a lot of online publishers, especially for those operating outside of Tbilisi, attracting advertisement is a challenge and often, they rely on support of international donor organizations.

Meanwhile, separation of advertisement and editorial content remains a problem for Georgian online media publishers¹⁰. There are cases when published material is not labeled as advertisement, or the label is not clear enough.

Separation of advertisement and editorial content is regulated by the law of Georgia “On Advertising”. According to the law, advertising material should immediately create an impression that it is an advertisement. According to the Article 9 of the Charter of Journalistic Ethics, editorial content must be clearly separated from marketing, advertising and sponsored materials.

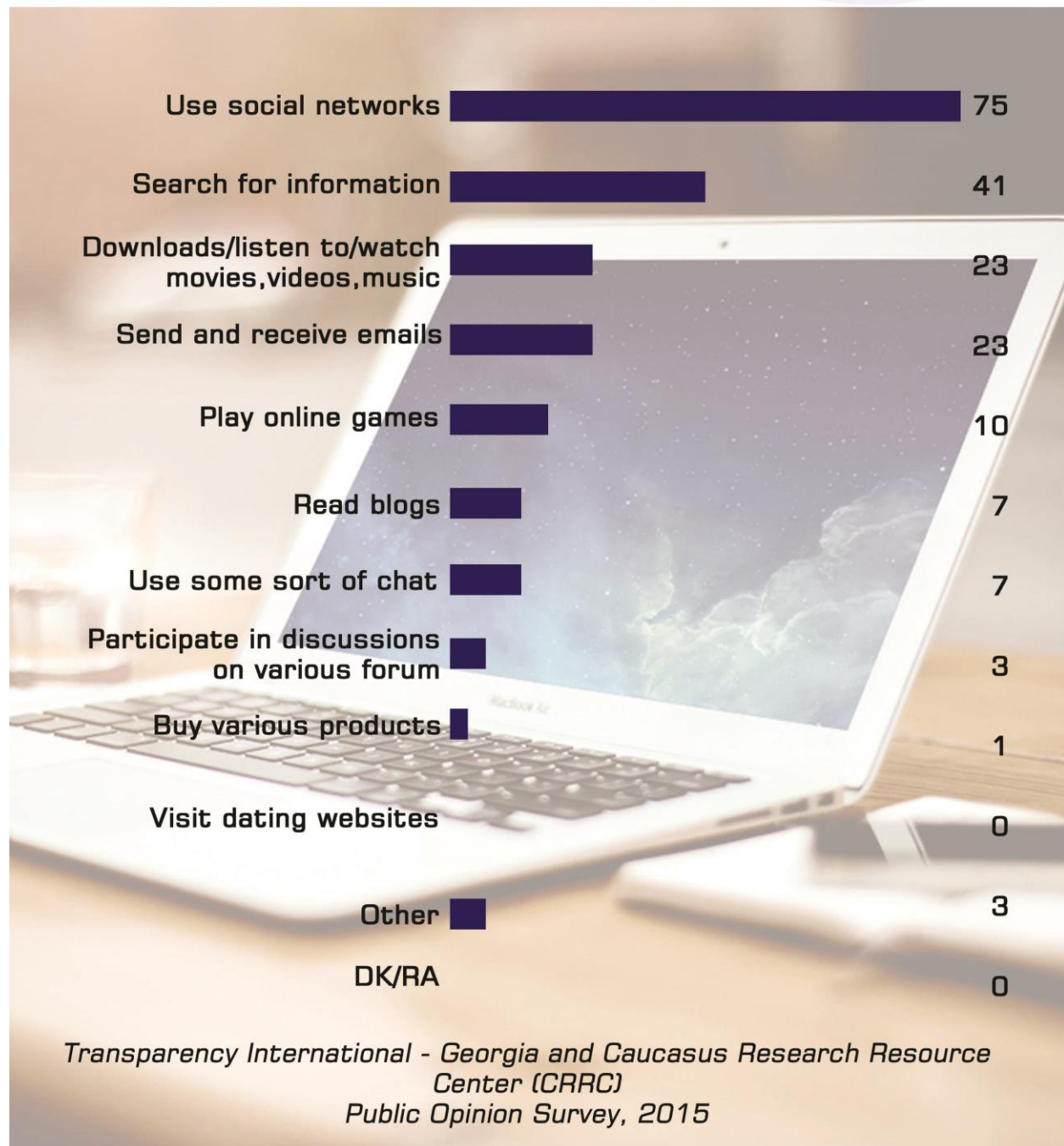
Facebook charges 0.01 USD for every 1000 clicks on an advertisement targeted at users in Georgia. The popularity of the website, the option to set target groups and monitoring tools, along with a simple user interface make Facebook the main competitor of Georgian online news websites.

Interviews conducted by TI Georgia have demonstrated that there are online media outlets that for months, and sometimes for an entire year, do not receive any revenue but continue to operate.

¹⁰ Online Media and Advertisement Placement Rules [in Georgian], Media Checker, <http://mediachecker.ge/mediacritics/detail/55/1>

What do you do most: often when using the internet? (% ,2015)

(of 44% who use the internet once a month or more often)



Online Media Outlets with Political Agenda

The internet and rapidly increasing access to it have completely overhauled how we access information. “Media outlets try to focus on online activities. As likes, comments and shares attract advertising budget, media organizations search for new ways of user engagement, which of course influences news as well. Furthermore, media organizations with a political agenda manage to spread their views very effectively”¹¹.

Anti-Western online media outlets

In the past several years, a group of websites has formed in the Georgian online space that are actively engaged in anti-Western propaganda. According to a media monitoring report of Media Development Foundation for 2014-2015 entitled Anti-Western Propaganda, the main source of anti-Western sentiments is media, while anti-Western rhetoric is usually applied in xenophobic and homophobic contexts¹².

In some cases, anti-Western media outlets receive revenue from the state budget in form of sales. Apart from sums demonstrated in the table below, the creator of the TV program Etaloni, LTD Media-Etaloni, broadcasted on TV channel Obiektivi, received GEL 68,616 from state agencies.

State Financing of Media Outlets That Promote Hate Speech (2013-2014)

Media Outlet	Sum (GEL)
Obiektivi	52,167
Republic of Georgia	63,923
Asaval-Dasavali	1,200

Source: Media Development Foundation, Financing of media outlets spreading anti-Western sentiments and hate speech from the state budget, 2015

Furthermore, damoukidebloba.com prepared a study exploring Russian connections of Georgian media and civil society. The study described activities of two major anti-Western organizations Eurasia Institute and Eurasian Choice along with other organizations and media outlets associated with them¹³. According

¹¹ Alecia Wanless, The Age of (Dis)information: How media is changing, public talk at Frontline Georgia, September 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/events/1635018736715447/>

¹² Anti-Western Propaganda, Media Development Foundation <http://mdfgeorgia.ge/uploads//Antidasavluri-ENG-web.pdf>

¹³ Russian Influence on Georgian Civil Society and Media [in Georgian], Damoukidebloba.com, <http://damoukidebloba.com/assets/up-modul/uploads/pdf/rusuli%20gavlena%20media%20da%20NGO-1.pdf>

to the study, these organizations and media outlets are exceptionally anti-Western, xenophobic and homophobic, and they are usually led by the same individuals. The study shows that anti-Western media outlets are connected with the Russian foundations.

One group of media outlets with an anti-Western agenda became apparent, they formally or informally cooperate with each other.

Reportiori.ge

The website Reportiori.ge is owned by LTD Reportiori, which also owns press club Reportiori. LTD Reportiori is owned by Giorgi Mamatsashvili and Nugzar Popkhadze, executive editor of the website is Ana Nodia.

Giorgi Mamatsashvili was for several years a journalist at the newspaper Asaval-Dasavali¹⁴. Asaval-Dasavali has been a beacon of anti-Western, homophobic and xenophobic views for quite some time. The newspaper uses hate speech very frequently, especially in regards to the representatives of the previous government¹⁵. According to the media monitoring conducted by Media Development Foundation, Asaval-Dasavali is one of the print media outlets that clearly states its anti-Western views¹⁶.

Nugzar Popkhadze was for a long time in charge of tele-radio broadcasting in Soviet Georgia and during the communist regime was a secretary of the Central Committee. Until 2004 Nugzar Popkhadze was the dean of Department of Journalism at Tbilisi State University. While Popkhadze was the dean, Giorgi Mamatsashvili was the chairman of student union of the department. Nugzar Popkhadze last came to the attention of media in August 2014 when secret recordings were published¹⁷.

Giorgi Mamatsashvili and Nugzar Popkhadze are also board members of NLE Club of Free Journalists VI Block¹⁸. A member of the board of the same organization is the former ombudsman and majoritarian candidate for Saburtalo from the Free Georgia party Nana Devdariani. Nana Devdariani is also a board member of the non-governmental organization Caucasian Cooperation, with Gulbaat Rtskhiladze as chairman of the board¹⁹. An organization with the same name was founded in Moscow in 2009. The

¹⁴ Giorgi Mamatsashvili, a journalist has been hunger striking for the second day in front of publishing house Samshoblo, <http://www.humanrights.ge/index.php?a=main&pid=10228&lang=eng>

¹⁵ Independent and Nonpartisan [in Georgian], Liberali, April 2010, http://dSPACE.nplg.gov.ge/bitstream/1234/8895/1/Liberali_2010_N25.pdf

¹⁶ Anti-Western Propaganda, Media Development Foundation <http://mdfgeorgia.ge/uploads//Antidasavluri-ENG-web.pdf>

¹⁷ Secret Recordings - Gharibashvili tasked his deputy with political issues [in Georgian], <http://www.tabula.ge/ge/story/75013-faruli-CHANATSERI-GHARIBASHVILMA-POLITIKURI-SAKITXEBI-MOADGILES-GADAABARA>

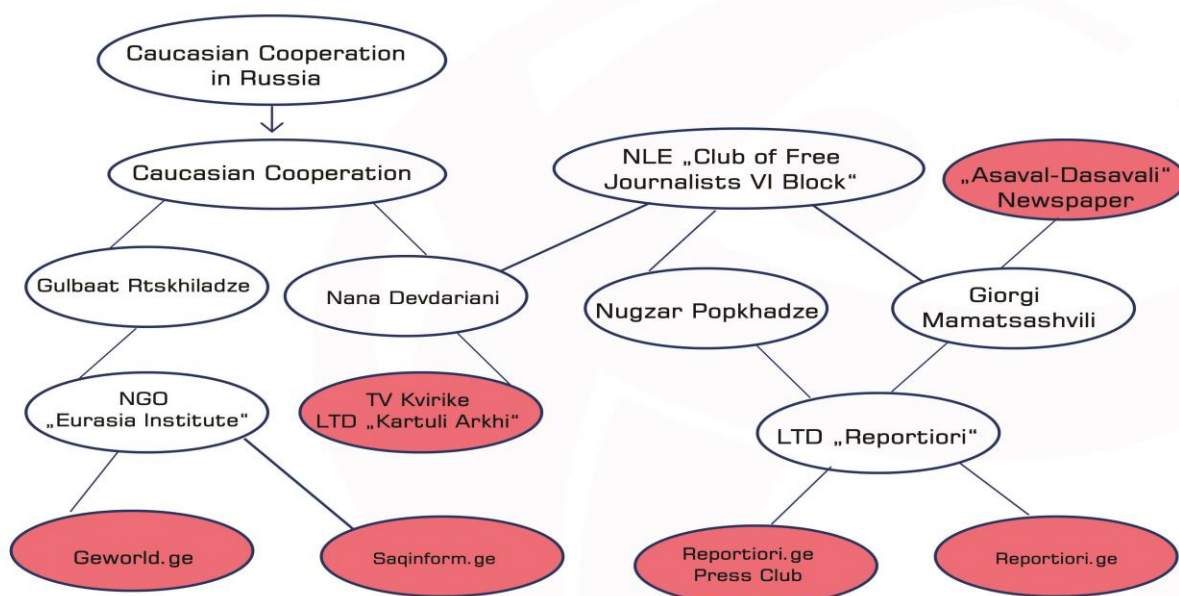
¹⁸ Club of Free Journalists VI Block, Registry of Commercial and Noncommercial Legal Entities, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B1ZzGSs7RxpR3pDR0RtZENDc2c/view>

¹⁹ Caucasian Cooperation, Registry of Commercial and Noncommercial Legal Entities, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B1ZzGSs7RxpR3pDR0RtZENDc2c/view>

organization founded in Georgia retains strong connections with the NGO Russian Caucasian Cooperation, and its goal is to “restore scientific cooperation” between the two countries²⁰.

According to the Reportiori.ge website the editorial group is planning to start issuing a new newspaper. A new online TV channel, Reportiori TV is also being developed. At the moment Reportiori.ge employs up to 30 people, however, according to the representative of the website, their revenue is miniscular.

On 27 August 2015, there were only three ad banners on the website. Among them, one is a link to a new creative writing competition Tbilisi organized by Tbilisi City Council. Tbilisi City Council paid GEL 300 for this banner²¹. Additionally, LTD Reportiori provided advertisements for GEL 2500 to the Organizational Committee of European Youth Olympics, and for GEL 1620 to the Ministry of Corrections. The price of an advertisement on the website is GEL 250-1000. However, in the interview with TI Georgia the representative of the website spoke of an additional small revenue from subscribers. As all the material on the website is free and does not require authorization, it is unclear what kind of services the website provides to its subscribers and what are the subscription fees associated with. The amount of the fee was also not disclosed by Reportiori.ge. We also could not find out the monthly salaries of the journalists working on the website.



Reportiori.ge's links

²⁰ Another meeting organized by Caucasian Cooperation [in Georgian], Saqinform.ge, http://saqinform.ge/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5747:--q-----q&catid=77:politika&Itemid=419#axzz3lQRawSC2

²¹ Contract on state procurement of a service, September 2015, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B1ZzGSs7RxkpSXRYU2hfdVBVTEU/view>

Marshallpress.ge

Marshallpress.ge names Reportiori.ge as one of its media partners. The website Marshallpress.ge was founded on 1 February 2015. The editor of Marshallpress.ge, and former journalist at Info9.ge, Otar Stefanishvili, who founded LTD Marshallpress.ge in May 2015 and is the owner and director of the company, mentioned in the interview with TI Georgia, that the website has 14000 unique daily visitors and that he has partnerships with three other websites²². One of these three websites is Georgian, Reportiori.ge, while the other two are registered in Ukraine: slovo.net.ua and wikileaks-ua.livejournal.com. Both of these Ukrainian websites are engaged in pro-Russian and anti-Western propaganda. Both websites also actively publish materials about the former president of Georgia and the current governor of Odessa region, Mikheil Saakashvili, and other former Georgian officials²³.

One such piece, re-published by Marshallpress.ge, about Mikheil Saakashvili and former Minister of Justice of Georgia, Zurab Adeishvili, was initially published by slovo.net.ua^{24,25}. The material consisted of a telephone conversation between Mikheil Saakashvili and Zurab Adeishvili. The editor of the website published a note under the material: "Marshallpress is not responsible for the authenticity of information published in Ukrainian media". The "phone conversation" published on the Ukrainian website did not include an audio file and was just in a text format. Despite this, the material was seen on the website by more than 38 thousand visitors, had 795 likes and 1500 shares from the Facebook users.

The material was also re-published by Asaval-Dasavali, the partner of Marshallpress.ge - Reportiori.ge, and a website Geonews.ge, which is an online platform of the newspaper Republic of Georgia^{26,27,28}.

²² News Agency www.info9.ge, owner Baia Tsanava

²³ Former President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili in despair [in Ukrainian], <http://slovo.net.ua/world/eks-prezident-gruzi%D1%97-m-saakashvili-u-rozpachi>

²⁴ Phone conversation of the Governor of Odessa (Saakasvhili) and the Prosecutor of Odessa (Adeishvili) [in Ukrainian and transliterated Georgian] <http://slovo.net.ua/ukrayna/telfonna-rozмова-hubernator-odeskoi-oblasti-saakashvili-z-prokurorom-odeskoi-oblasti-adeishvili>

²⁵ Ukrainian media publishes conversation of Saakashvili and Adeishvili about the natural disaster [in Georgian] <http://marshallpress.ge/?p=6404>

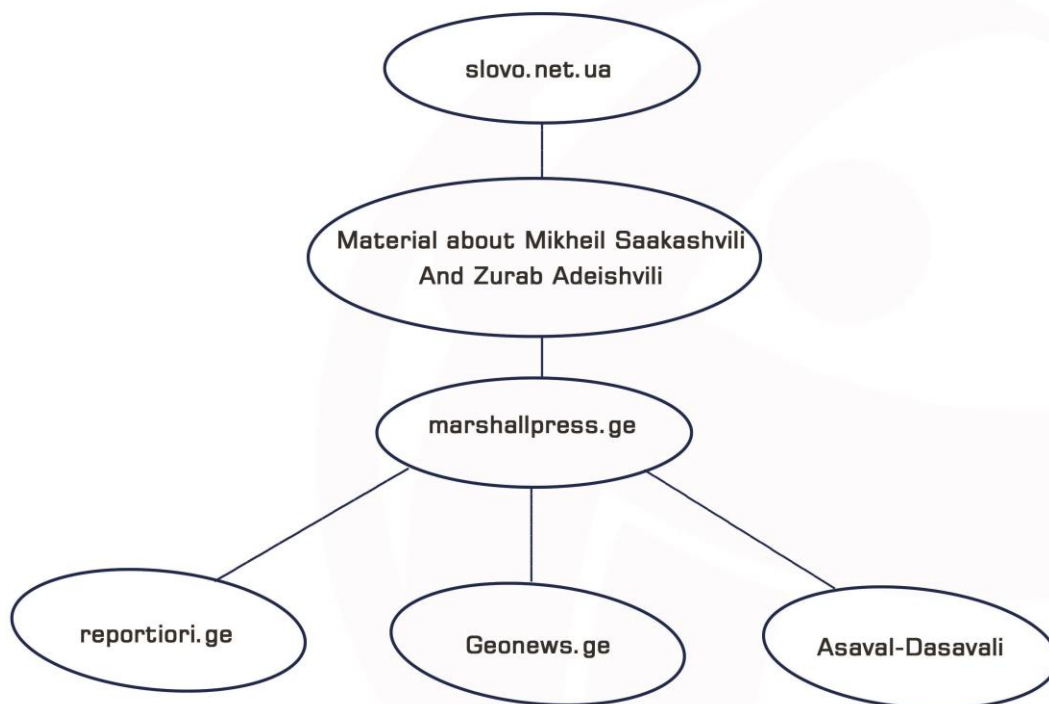
²⁶ Asaval-Dasavali N25, Dito Chubinidze, June 22-28, 2015

²⁷ Mikheil Saakashvili: It will be fun if someone gets eaten by a crocodile or if the animals manage to sneak in Bidzina's garden [in Georgian], <http://www.reportiori.ge/?lang=1&menuid=48&id=69850>

²⁸ It will be fun if someone gets eaten by a crocodile, or if animals manage to sneak in Bidzina's "penguins", that will be even funnier - conversation between Saakashvili and Adeishvili [in Georgian], <http://geonews.ge/geo/news/story/63979--magrad-unda-vikaifo-niangma-tu-shechama-saakashvil-adeishvilis-saubari->



Partner Media Organizations of Marshallpress.ge



Distribution of material by Marshallpress.ge

Geworld.ge and Saqinform.ge

Geworld.ge and Saqinform.ge were founded almost at the same time and work in cooperation with each other. The representatives of the websites did not wish to speak with TI Georgia. Both publications are anti-Western. According to the study conducted by Media Development Foundation, Geworld.ge and Saqinform.ge are the leaders in cultivating and spreading anti-Western views online²⁹. In the study of Damoukidebloba.com, separate chapters are dedicated to these publications³⁰. The study clearly demonstrates a direct link between these media outlets and organizations under Russian influence.

The newspaper *Georgia and the World* was founded in 2009. It is published by NLE Historical Heritage and its editor-in-chief is Irakli Todua³¹. Irakli Todua, along with the editor of Asaval-Dasavali Lasha Nadareishvili is a board member of the Creative Union of Georgian Journalists³². The newspaper publishes the online platform Geworld.ge, which produces its own content. The website is trilingual and is updated daily.

The news agency Saqinform, which owns the online platform saqinform.ge, was founded in 2010 and its editor is Arno Kidirbegishvili (Arno Kidirbegishvili is a director and owner of LTD Georgian News Agency Saqinform, registered in April 2013). Both, geworld.ge and saqinform.ge domains are registered to the name of the head of Historical Heritage, Taras Gagnidze. Both media outlets, as well as the owner organization of their domains, Historical Heritage, are partners of Eurasia Institute. Both media outlets can be visited through a link placed under the partners section of Eurasia Institute website.

Along with Geworld.ge and Saqinform.ge, partners of Eurasia Institute include Georus.org - People's Movement for Georgia-Russia Dialogue and Cooperation and Lev Gumilov Center³³³⁴. The Eurasia Institute was founded in Georgia in 2009³⁵. Founders of Eurasia Institute are Gulbaat Rtskhiladze and Giorgi Vekua. Gulbaat Rtskhiladze is also a board member of Caucasian Cooperation. A member of the board of the same organization is Nana Devdariani, who, along with the owners of Reportiori.ge, is a board member of NLE Club of Free Journalists VI Block³⁶. Eurasia Institute is an openly pro-Russian organization. The midterm report of the organization reads: "to this day the main focus of Eurasia

²⁹ Anti-Western Propaganda, Media Development Foundation <http://mdfgeorgia.ge/uploads//Antidasavluri-ENG-web.pdf>

³⁰ Russian Influence on Georgian Civil Society and Media [in Georgian], Damoukidebloba.com, <http://damoukidebloba.com/assets/up-modul/uploads/pdf/rusuli%20gavlena%20media%20da%20NGO-1.pdf>

³¹ Georgia and the World, About Us, <http://www.geworld.ge/About.php?lang=en>

³² Creative Union of Georgian Journalists, Registry of Commercial and Noncommercial Legal Entities [in Georgian], <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B1ZzGSs7RxpZINoZFBqeWNTQ00/view>

³³ People's Movement for the Russian and Georgian Dialogue and Cooperation, <http://www.georus.org/index.php?do=cat&category=eng-main>

³⁴ Lev Gumilev Center: Modern Eurasia [in Russian] <http://www.gumilev-center.ru/>

³⁵ Political Forum: Information and Analytical portal of Eurasia Institute [in Georgian and Russian] <http://geurasia.org/geo/index.php>

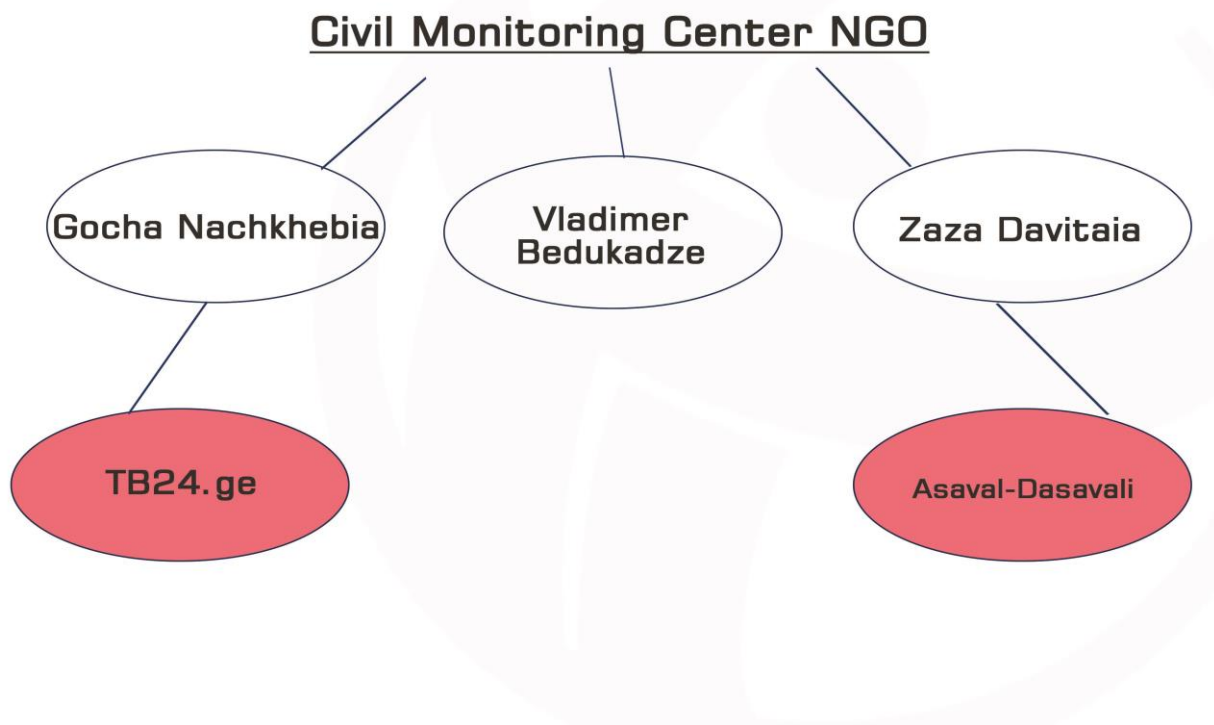
³⁶ Club of Free Journalists VI Block, Registry of Commercial and Noncommercial Legal Entities, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B1ZzGSs7RxpR3pDR0RtZENDc2c/view>

Institute is Russia-Georgia relations - analysis of these relations and practical support of improvement”³⁷.

TB24.ge

The website tb24.ge was founded on 1 April 2015. According to the information provided by the editor Gocha Nachkhebia there are 2 journalists and 1 consultant working on the website. However, by 30 June 2015 the website had no ad or other type of revenue. The website prepares around 16 articles daily and re-publishes material prepared by other media outlets, noting their source³⁸.

The website was registered by LTD Tbilisi 24, whose director Gocha Nachkhebia. The company is owned by Gocha Nachkhebia (50%) and Maia Shaishmelashvili (50%). Gocha Nachkhebia is a board member of several non-governmental organizations. Among them is Civil Monitoring Center, which was registered in December 2013 and whose chairman of the board is Vladimer Bedukadze, the distributor of the video recordings of prisoner tortures. Another member of the board is Asaval-Dasavali journalist Zaza Davitaia.



TB24.ge's links

³⁷ Five Years of Eurasia Institute - Midterm Report [in Georgian] <http://geurasia.org/panel/uploads/PDF/5-weli-qartuli-saboloo.pdf>

³⁸ Written communication of TI Georgia with the editor of tb24.ge, Gocha Nachkhebia

Zaza Davitaia's name, along with the newspaper Asaval-Dasavali, is associated with a confrontation between two youth organizations Free Generation and Free Zone³⁹. An incident between Zaza Davitaia and Free Zone became a reason for an attack of Free Generation on the office of Free Zone. However, these two organizations had confrontations before the incident with Zaza Davitaia. The main reason for their confrontation is their political preferences⁴⁰. Free Generation was using protests to demand the ban of the opposition political party, United National Movement. Free Zone actively criticized the ruling Georgian Dream coalition, accused it of being anti-Western and pro-Russian, and called Free Generation a satellite non-governmental organization for Georgian Dream^{41,42}. Both youth organizations have online platforms, publishing political news, opinions and analytical articles.

NNLE Youth Movement - Free Generation was officially founded on 13 November 2014, however the group was engaged in various activities before this. The founder and the leader of the informal group, and later the organization, is Vladimer Sadghobelashvili.

Vladimer Sadghobelashvili is also a founder of another organization, NNLE Movement Motherland, Language, Faith. This organization was officially registered in January 2011 and immediately engaged in political opposition activities. The activities of Sadghobelashvili and his organization were mostly focused on protesting against the conditions in prisons, supporting a mass amnesty, and conducting protests against United National Movement and its leaders. The activities of this newly-founded and completely unknown organization were actively covered by the anti-Western media outlets (for examples see materials published by Saqinform.ge⁴³, Geonews.ge⁴⁴, Geworld.ge⁴⁵, Reportiori.ge⁴⁶,

³⁹ Activists of Free Zone arrested, charged with beating Zaza Davitaia [in Georgian], <http://www.tabula.ge/ge/story/88193-tavisufali-zonis-tsevrebi-zaza-davitaia-cemis-braldebit-daakaves>

⁴⁰ Free Generation vs. Free Zone - Confrontation in front of UNM office (photo/video material) [in Georgian], <http://www.netgazeti.ge/GE/105/News/36952/>

⁴¹ Protest of Free Zone in support of NATO and criticism of pro-Russian government [video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SODW4w-qmpU>

⁴² Fight in the name of freedom, Jimsher Rekhviashvili, Radio Liberty, <http://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/content/tavisupali-zonisa-da-tavisupali-taobis-dapirispireba/26615631.html>

⁴³ Movement Language, Motherland, Faith joins the protests [in Georgian] http://saqinform.ge/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4341:2011-06-03-14-35-08&catid=67:vmire&Itemid=391#axzz3kUayN3n5

⁴⁴ Movement Language, Motherland, Faith is demanding re-hiring of dismissed teachers [in Georgian] <http://geonews.ge/geo/news/story/2674-mamuli-ena-sarwmunoeba>

⁴⁵ Lado Sadghobelashvili: Saakashvili should be running from court to court, not from CNN to BBC [in Georgian] <http://geonews.ge/geo/news/story/2674-mamuli-ena-sarwmunoeba>

⁴⁶ Free Generation: We have information that Free Zone is preparing for aggressive protests in the near future [in Georgian] <http://www.reportiori.ge/?menuid=3&id=38699>

Obiektivi TV⁴⁷). Vladimer Sadghobelashvili and his organization, Free Generation also actively rally on the issues of sexual minorities.⁴⁸⁴⁹

Today the activities of Free Generation are almost completely concentrated against the former ruling party and now parliamentary opposition United National Movement. Proof to this are materials published on the website ttaoba.ge, and protests in front of the United National Movement office and the homes of its leaders⁵⁰. In autumn of 2014 activists of the organization were even demanding banning the party⁵¹. On 2 March 2015, 6 people were arrested in front of the office of United National Movement, among them was the leader of Free Generation Vladimer Sadghobelashvil⁵². They threw paint and eggs at the office of UNM and demanded that the party not to proceed with its planned demonstration on 21 March. The members of the organization and their leader Vladimer Sadghobelashvili are also authors of the analytical articles published on the website of Free Generation.

Online media outlets with agenda of political opposition

After United National Movement lost in the parliamentary elections of 2012, several non-governmental and civil society organizations were created, some of which also have informational websites. These organizations and their websites are usually directly connected with the members of the former ruling party, ex-high officials or members of their families. One common denominator of these online media outlets is their sharp criticism and negative tone in regards to the current government, originating from political preferences of their founders and owners.

Tzona.org

NNLE Club Free Zone was founded after the 2012 parliamentary elections by a member of United National Movement, Koba Khabazi. The organization was registered officially on 21 May 2013. The board members include Gela Vasadze and Arseni Oniani, with Koba Khabazi as executive director.

Koba Khabazi was a Member of the 2008 Parliament from the United National Movement party list. After the 2012 parliamentary elections, Koba Khabazi and his organization, on the one hand, organized activities with the agenda of the political opposition, and on the other hand, actively confronted pro-Russian organizations and political groups⁵³⁵⁴. On several occasions members of Free Zone were

⁴⁷ Lado Sadghobelashvili at Media Union Obiektivi [Video] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pESSBknc_p4

⁴⁸ Lado Sadghobelashvili: Saakashvili should be running from court to court, not from CNN to BBC [in Georgian] <http://geonews.ge/geo/news/story/2674-mamuli-ena-sarwmunoeba>

⁴⁹ Free Generation - No to same sex marriage in Georgia [in Georgian] <http://goo.gl/AnWaBZ>

⁵⁰ Free Generation organized protests in front of Giga Bokeria's house [in Georgian] <http://www.tabula.ge/ge/story/93809-tavisufalma-taobam-giga-bokerias-saxltan-aqcia-gamarta>

⁵¹ Free Generation vs. Free Zone - Confrontation in front of UNM office (photo/video material) [in Georgian], <http://www.netgazeti.ge/GE/105/News/36952/>

⁵² Six people, including Sadghobelashvili, arrested in front of the UNM office [in Georgian] <http://www.tabula.ge/ge/story/93264-enm-is-ofistan-eqysi-adamiani-mat-shoris-lado-sadghobelashvili-daakaves>

⁵³ Protests and Meetings of Free Zone [in Georgian] <http://www.tzona.org/cat/meetings>

arrested and fined with accusations of taking part in incidents at protests⁵⁵. Particularly noteworthy was the confrontation of Free Zone with Free Generation and the supporters of Eurasia Institute⁵⁶.

Club Free Zone manages a website of the organization www.tzona.org, where, along with the material regarding the recent activities of the organization, analytical articles on various political, social, and economic issues are published. Free Zone was created to support UNM after the 2012 elections, the members of the organization have, on numerous occasions, publicly stated their support and sympathy for the former ruling party, its members and ex-President Mikheil Saakashvili⁵⁷. These sympathies are also clearly expressed in the materials published on the website.

According to the representative of Free Zone, 13 people work on the website. They do not receive any remuneration. The website does not have any ad or other type of revenue.

The website is updated almost daily and its managers actively use various online platforms, including social networks, and their Facebook page⁵⁸. It is worth noting that several regional organizations of Free Zone are also registered on the social network.

Freshnews.ge

Internet TV Fresh News was founded in 2014. Owner of the TV portal is LTD Alternative News Television, which was registered on 30 May 2014. According to records in the public registry, the owners of the LTD Alternative News Television are journalist Nanuka Jorjoliani (70%) and Mate Kirvalidze (30%). Nanuka Jorjoliani also owns 100% of LTD Nanuka Jorjoliani Show, which prepares a talk show Nanuka's Show for Rustavi 2. Mate Kirvalidze is an editor of a website pirveliradio.ge. This website is an extension of Pirveli Radio station (FM 106.4), however it also prepares original content on social and political issues.

After the 2012 parliamentary elections, Journalist Nanuka Jorjoliani expressed her critical opinion of the new ruling coalition and more concretely of Bidizna Ivanishvili on her personal Facebook page^{59,60}. The internet television freshnews.ge is also explicitly pro-opposition. The material published on the website

⁵⁴ Free Zone organized a protest 'No to Sochi Olympics' at the business-center [in Georgian] <http://www.tabula.ge/ge/story/75476-tavisufalma-zonam-biznescentrtan-aqcia-ara-sochis-olimpiadas-gamarta>

⁵⁵ Topic: Free Zone [in Georgian] <http://www.tabula.ge/ge/topic/%E1%83%97%E1%83%90%E1%83%95%E1%83%98%E1%83%A1%E1%83%A3%E1%83%A4%E1%83%90%E1%83%9A%E1%83%98-%E1%83%96%E1%83%9D%E1%83%9C%E1%83%90>

⁵⁶ Members of Eurasian Choice and Free Zone confront each other [in Georgian] <http://www.tabula.ge/ge/story/74930-evraziuli-archevanisa-da-tavisufali-zonis-tsevrebi-ertmanets-daupirispirdnen>

⁵⁷ Fight in the name of freedom, Jimsher Rekhviashvili, Radio Liberty, <http://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/content/tavisupali-zonisa-da-tavisupali-taobis-dapirispireba/26615631.html>

⁵⁸ Facebook Page of Free Zone [in Georgian] <https://www.facebook.com/tzona.org?fref=ts>

⁵⁹ Personal Facebook page of Nanuka Jorjoliani [in Georgian] <https://www.facebook.com/nanuka.zhorzholiani>

⁶⁰ Facebook post of Nanuka Jorjoliani on her personal page [in Georgian] <https://www.facebook.com/nanuka.zhorzholiani/posts/10153520595999350?pnref=story>

covers various branches of government and the activities of high officials in a negative tone, while often not accurately presenting their position (for example see a special report Tina Khidasheli Lost⁶¹ and etc.).

Editori.ge

The news agency Editori.ge was founded by LTD Droanews in 2014. The agency is a partner of NNLE Innovation and Development Foundation (IDF - www.idf.ge) . IDF was officially founded in February 2014 and its founder is a Member of Parliament from the United National Movement party list, Giorgi Vashadze⁶². Other experts of the foundation (Jaba Ebanoidze, Giorgi Gabrielashvili, Nato Gagnidze, Sergo Tsikarishvili, Nino Chichua, Mukhran Burchuladze, Giorgi Tsikarishvili and etc.) are initiators and former managers of reforms of the civil and public registry, tax system, electronic services and houses of justice.

Another news portal, which is connected with Innovation and Development Foundation and the news agency Editor.ge, is a regional online newspaper in Kakheti and the non-governmental organization Mediatori.ge. The news agency Editori.ge operates from the IDF office. Among the partners of Innovation and Development Foundation are several governmental agencies of Ukraine, as well as Computer Literacy Society, also founded by Giorgi Vashadze^{63,64}. Despite the fact, that the activities of Innovation and Development Foundation are mostly focused on supporting innovative and educational projects, political preferences of the group are clear from the active political life of its founder and the international partners of the organization.

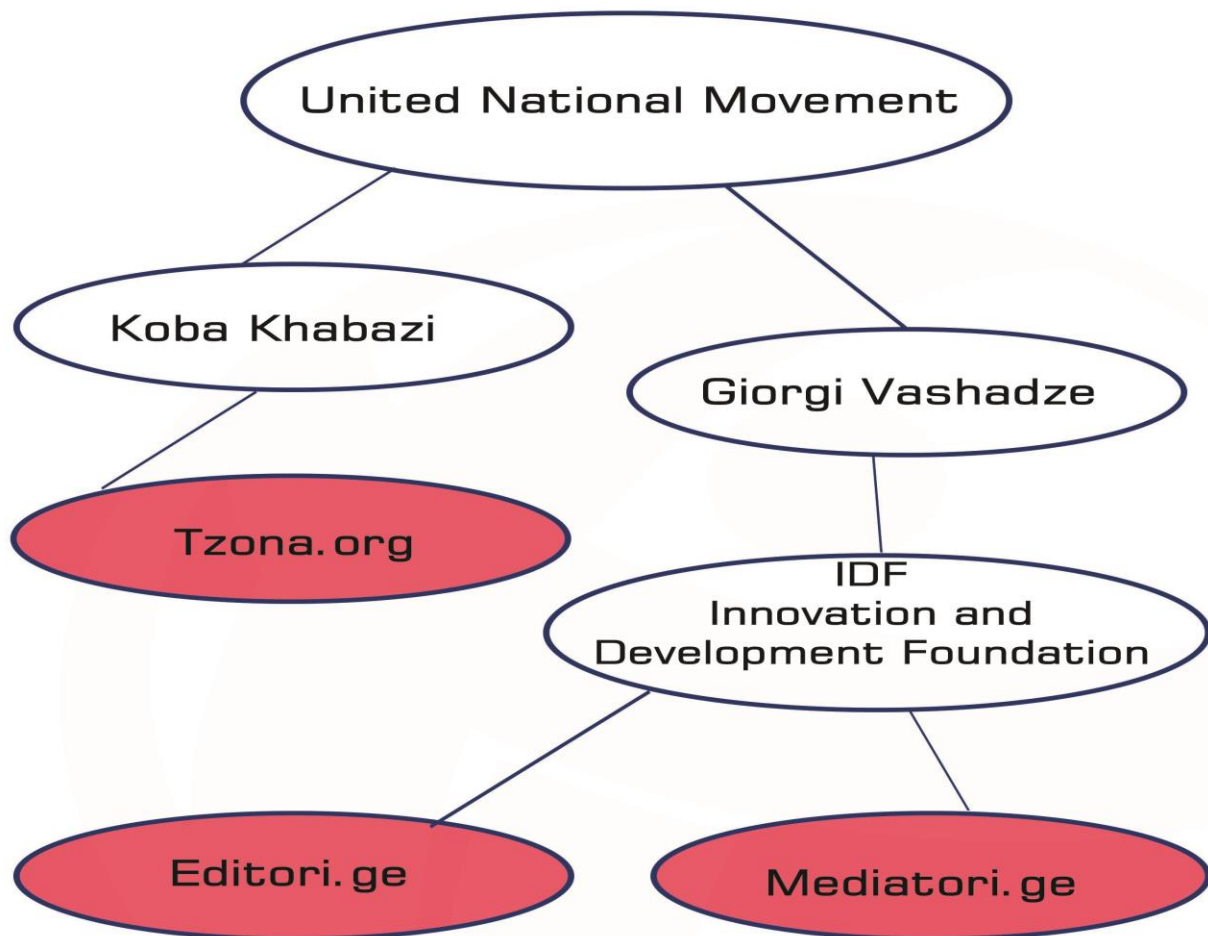
The news agency Editori.ge mostly covers political news and the majority of material published on the website is critical of the ruling party and more concretely, of the former Prime Minister, Bidzina Ivanishvili. Editori.ge does not sell advertisements, and does not have any type of revenue. The website is maintained by 6 volunteers.

⁶¹ Tina Khidasheli Lost [Video] [in Georgian] <http://freshnews.ge/ge/specialuri-reportaji/idzebneba-tina-xidasheli1.page>

⁶² IDF, About Us [in Georgian] http://idf.ge/?page=news&menu_id=31

⁶³ IDF, International Partners [in Georgian] http://idf.ge/index.php?page=news&cat_id=&position_id=1&menu_id=48

⁶⁴ Website of Computer Literacy Society [in Georgian] <http://www.taoba.ge/site/>



Online media outlets with agenda of political opposition

Iveria.biz

The news portal iveria.biz has been publishing analytical articles about foreign and domestic politics, the economy and international news for several years now. Among the founders of the news portal are several former high officials from the United National Movement government: former Minister of Culture Nika Rurua, former Minister of Foreign Affairs Grigol Vashadze, former deputy Foreign Ministers Nino Kalandze and Nikoloz Vashakidze, former ambassador of Georgia to France Mamuka Kudava⁶⁵. Society Iveria, which publishes the website iveria.biz, converted into a civil movement in March 2015 and openly declared its plan to participate in the 2016 Parliamentary elections⁶⁶.

⁶⁵ Nikoloz Vashakidze: Page of the author [in Georgian] <http://iveria.biz/nikoloz-vashakidze.html>

⁶⁶ Organization Iveria plans to participate in the 2016 parliamentary elections [in Georgian] <http://www.interpressnews.ge/ge/politika/321637-organizacia-qiveriaq-2016-tslis-saparlamento-archevnebsi-monatsileobas-gegmavs.html?ar=A>

Online media outlets connected with the government administration

Agenda.ge

English language portal Agenda.ge came to the attention of the society in October 2014 after the International New York Times published an article about the former prime minister Bidzina Ivanishvili and ex-President Mikheil Saakashvili called “Saakashvili Prosecuted By his own Past, not Putin’s ‘Accomplice’ Ivanishvili”, written by the Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia⁶⁷. A whole advertisement page of International New York Times was bought for publication of this article and according to the newspaper, the expense was covered by Agenda.ge.

Agenda.ge is not registered as a separate legal entity, it is a structural entity of the Chancellery of the Government of Georgia. In the database of domains Registration.ge, www.agenda.ge domain is registered to the Chancellery and it is connected to the state server. The contact information and address published on the website is identical to the contact information of the Chancellery⁶⁸. When media expressed interest regarding the possibility of state funds being spent through the news agency, the Minister of Finance Nodar Khaduri said that Agenda.ge was not supported from the budget, and no money has been transferred to International New York Times from the state treasury⁶⁹.

Agenda.ge did not respond to the questions of TI Georgia regarding founding, revenue and number of employees of the agency. In the About Us section of the website following text can be found: “initialized by the Government of Georgia, Agenda.ge brings to you all the news from politics to sport, persons in focus, and gives in depth analysis of the important topics”⁷⁰. According to the website, it will soon be available in 6 languages.

Irakligaribashvili.ge

The website Irakligaribashvili.ge is mentioned on the official Facebook page of the Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili, along with two other websites: www.prime-minister.ge and www.irakligaribashvili.com⁷¹. The web resource irakligaribashvili.ge in May-June was working very actively and was updated daily. TI Georgia contacted the administrator and editor of the website, Beka Mchedlishvili, according to whom irakligaribashvili.ge “is an official page of the Prime Minister. Therefore, it does not have any advertisement or grant revenue, and is not an agency”. On the question, what sources were used to finance the official page of the Prime Minister, Beka Mchedlishvili asked us to “officially request

⁶⁷ Saakashvili prosecuted by his own past, not Putin’s ‘accomplice’ Ivanishvili <https://i2.wp.com/dfwatch.net/wp-content/gallery/post-attachments/internationalnewyorktimes-david-usupashvili-article.jpg>

⁶⁸ Agenda.ge Contact information.ge <http://agenda.ge/contact/eng>

⁶⁹ Khaduri: Agenda.ge is not supported from the state budget [in Georgian] <http://www.tabula.ge/ge/story/88772-xaduri-agendage-sabiujeto-organizacia-ar-aris>

⁷⁰ Agenda.ge, About Us <http://agenda.ge/about/eng>

⁷¹ Facebook page of Irakli Gharibashvili https://www.facebook.com/GaribashviliOfficial/info?tab=page_info

information on the email address of the Administration of the Government of Georgia”, so they could officially respond. TI Georgia sent an official letter with questions regarding the website to the email address provided by the editor and administrator of the official website of the Prime Minister, however we did not receive a response. After requesting public information, the government administration responded that irakligaribashvili.ge is owned by a private person and the government administration has not paid any expenses in regards to this website⁷². All three official websites are registered to Beka Mchedlishvili and not to the Chancellery. Beka Mchedlishvili is employed as a social media manager at the Office of Prime Minister⁷³.

⁷² Letter of the Administration of the Government of Georgia [in Georgian]
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B1ZzGSs7RxkpSmlhMW9XMVItM0E/view>

⁷³ Personal Facebook Page of Beka Mchedlishvili <https://www.facebook.com/begex?fref=ts>

Television

Disputed Ownership of Rustavi 2

On 5 August 2015, based on a request from businessman Kibar Khalvashi and his LTD Panorama, the court ordered that the assets of Rustavi 2 be frozen, which significantly limited the managing functions of its directors and shareholders. According to the management of the TV station, this has put the proper functioning of the TV channel in jeopardy.

After Kibar Khalvashi's lawyers' appeal⁷⁴ on 1 October court distrain 51 % shares of "Rustavi 2" owing by company "TV Sakartvelo". Two days earlier National Agency of Public Register registered the application about alienation of "TV Sakartvelo" shares. The new buyer of shares "TV Sakartvelo", which is owned by the brother' Karamanishvili, was the brother- in-law of Davit Kezerashvili – Dimitri Chikovani, but as the shares were frozen by court decision the deal failed. According to purchase agreement⁷⁵, the new owner planned to invest USD 6 million in "Rustavi 2". By ruling management of "Rustavi 2" this agreement and investment was a solution for financial problems emerged after distrain, as company has limited access to own finances. This decision leaves "Rustavi 2" without any source of funding⁷⁶.

Rustavi 2 was founded in 1994 by Erosi Kitsmarishvili, Jarji Akimidze and Davit Dvali. Akimidze and Dvali sold their shares in 2004, and after the 2012 parliamentary elections said, that they would seek the return of their shares through court⁷⁷.

Between 2004-2012 the owners of Rustavi 2 changed almost 20 times⁷⁸. Individuals associated with members of the former government often took part, in suspicious circumstances, in this process, which was not transparent to society.

After the 2012 parliamentary elections, the TV station has become very critical towards the ruling party. Using the argument of the bias of the TV station and its loyalty towards the previous government, the high-ranking officials of the current government often express dissatisfaction with the stance of Rustavi2.

⁷⁴ After Kibar Khalvashi Request Court distrained shares of "TV Sakartvelo" - Interpressnews, <http://www.interpressnews.ge/ge/sazogadoeba/347725-qibar-khalvashis-mothkhovnis-safudzvelze-sasamarthlom-telekompania-qsagarthvelosq-tsilebi-daayadagha.html?ar=A>

⁷⁵ Purchase agreement - Studia Monitor <https://www.facebook.com/154957741233605/photos/pcb.970771906318847/970762112986493/?type=3&theater>

⁷⁶ Gvaramia: On fourth year of amazing democracy government closed Rustavi 2 - netgazeti.ge <http://www.netgazeti.ge/GE/105/News/50505/>

⁷⁷ Rustavi 2 former owners to start legal fight to get TV company back <http://www.media.ge/en/portal/news/50277/>

⁷⁸ The TV station of 'victorious people': The story of Rustavi 2 <http://www.transparency.ge/en/blog/tv-station-%E2%80%98victorious-people-story-rustavi-2>

The court has partially granted Khalvashi's application for securing the claim and passed a corresponding ruling. Non-governmental organizations issued a statement regarding the ruling of the court and underlined the political context along with the legal shortcomings of the ruling.

The OSCE representative on Freedom of the Media, Dunja Mijatović also made a statement regarding the freezing of Rustavi 2 assets and the lawsuit⁷⁹. According to her, the excessive court measures may pose a threat to media pluralism in Georgia.

US Charge d'affaires Nicholas Berliner talked to Media.ge regarding the developments around the TV channel and said, that the appearance of the media freedom being threatened and media pluralism being compromised were troubling⁸⁰. US State Department Deputy spokesman, Mark Toner made a statement on Rustavi 2, calling the actions constricting media pluralism disturbing⁸¹.

The management of Rustavi 2 consistently brought to the attention of viewers the critical statements of high-ranking officials toward the TV channel, including opinions stated during live broadcasts. There were cases when the members of the current ruling coalition and high-ranking officials reminded the management of Rustavi 2, that the ownership of the TV Company was to be revised⁸². High ranking political figures continued to publically state their opinions regarding the ownership of the channel even after businessman Kibar Khalvashi, on 5 August, filed a lawsuit in regards to the shares he had owned in the company 10 years ago⁸³.

⁷⁹ OSCE Representative says excessive court measures against television station in Georgia may pose a threat to media pluralism <http://www.osce.org/fom/176521>

⁸⁰ "There is an impression that media freedom is in danger"- the chargé d'affaires of the U.S comments on the developments around Rustavi 2 <http://rustavi2.com/en/news/24130>

⁸¹ The US State Department issued a statement on Rustavi 2 - Rustavi 2 <http://rustavi2.com/en/news/28247>

⁸² Statements of Agulashvili and Kaladze regarding Rustavi 2 are different [in Georgian] <http://www.tabula.ge/ge/story/98722-rustavi-2-tan-dakavshirebit-agulashvilisa-da-kaladzis-gancxadebebi-gansxvavebulia>

⁸³ According to Sozar Subari, Khalvashi was made to withdraw from Rustavi 2 under duress [in Georgian] <http://rustavi2.com/ka/news/23349>

Changes at Tabula

On 12 June 2015 the National Communications Commission allowed the TV Company Tabula to sell two frequencies to Rustavi 2. These included the frequencies owned by Tabula that covered Kutaisi, Batumi, Gori, Sachkhere and Senaki. Tabula leased these frequencies to Rustavi 2 for their Comedy Channel. Initially both licenses were general broadcasting licenses, however in October 2014 their status changed to specialized broadcasting licenses.

The broadcasting licenses would have been discontinued on 17 June 2015 and all existing broadcasters would become authorized persons. So it was not clear to the Commission what the motive behind Tabula's request was⁸⁴. However, the director of the company, Tamar Chergoleishvili stated, that Rustavi 2 was interested in these frequencies and Tabula wanted to mobilize financial resources⁸⁵. Therefore, Tabula decided to sell both frequencies along with its accompanying infrastructure to Rustavi 2.

Tabula also reorganized the company because of financial problems. Part of the employees left the channel, the news program changed its format and the main focus of the company became its website www.tabula.ge. In the first half of 2015, the company declared GEL 39,242 in ad revenue, while in the same period of 2014 the revenue was 250,000. However, apart from the ad revenue, the TV company received GEL 530 437 in donations and other types of income in January-June 2015.

On 25 March 2015 TV channel Tabula disappeared from Magtiset cable broadcasting package⁸⁶. As the director of the channel, Tamar Chergoleishvili explained, Magtiset offered new, amended terms for continuation of its contract with the channel, which would put the media company in severe financial conditions, and therefore, were unacceptable.

⁸⁴ Georgian National Communications Commission responds to the application of the director of NLE Civic Education Foundation (Tabula TV) Tamar Chergoleishvili [in Georgian] <http://www.gncc.ge/ge/news/press-releases/saqartvelos-komunikaciebis-erovnuli-komisia-aip-samoqalago-ganatilebis-fondis-telekompania-tabula-xelmdzgvanelis-tamar-cherholeishvilis-gancxadebas-exmianebs>

⁸⁵ Tabula planning to sell two frequencies to Rustavi 2 [in Georgian] <http://www.netgazeti.ge/GE/105/News/45889/>

⁸⁶ Tabula not available to subscribers of Magtiset [in Georgian] <http://www.tabula.ge/ge/story/94414-magtisat-abonentebs-aghar-aqvt-tabulas-signalis-mighebis-shesadzlebloba>

Personnel changes at broadcasters

Despite the fact that there have not been any major changes in the ownership of broadcasters in 2014, owners were actively participating in management of channels at some companies, triggering personnel changes and affecting editorial policies.

Georgian Public Broadcaster

In September 2014, the head of newsroom of Channel One of Georgian Public Broadcaster Sophio Mosidze was appointed as the head of Press Office of the Administration of the Government⁸⁷. The head of newsroom at the channel has not been appointed since, and the interim head of newsroom is the producer of Moambe, Lasha Mikeladze⁸⁸. In October 2015 political analyst Giorgi Gvimradze was appointed to this position.

The Board of Trustees of Georgian Public Broadcaster still has not been fully appointed and the board operates with 7 members, instead of 9. Parliament could not select members proposed under the minority quota.

In September 2015, there were reports that the talk show of Eka Mishveladze Pirveli Studia (First Studio) on Channel One was being discontinued, and that this was related to the marriage of Eka Mishveladze and one of the leaders of Free Democrats party, Alexi Petriashvili⁸⁹. A consultant to the director of Georgian Public Broadcaster, Basa Janikashili announced that because of the marriage, Eka Mishveladze had a conflict of interests, however as of publication the broadcaster had not issued an official statement about the issue.

On 8 September, on Rustavi 2, Eka Mishveladze alleged that she and her husband⁹⁰ were under surveillance. This statement once again demonstrated the critical state of privacy and illegal surveillance

⁸⁷ Sopo Mosidze appointed as a head of Press Office of the Administration of the Government [in Georgian] <http://www.netgazeti.ge/GE/105/News/35506/>

⁸⁸ Lasha Mikeladze appointed as an interim head of newsroom [in Georgian] <http://www.netgazeti.ge/GE/105/News/37662/>

⁸⁹ GPB names marriage of Eka Mishveladze to a politician as a reason for discontinuation of her talk show [in Georgian] <http://www.tabula.ge/ge/story/99300-gpb-eka-mishveladze-gadacemis-daxurvis-mizezad-politikosis-colobas-asaxeles>

⁹⁰ Eka Mishveladze confirms surveillance over her and Alexi Petriashvili [in Georgian] <http://rustavi2.com/ka/news/25744>

in Georgia. Despite calls from the civil society, law enforcement agencies have not reacted to this fact yet⁹¹.

Maestro

In December 2014 about 20 journalists left the TV channel Maestro, after the head of newsroom Nino Zhizhilashvili was dismissed^{92,93}. According to the journalists, the main reason for their decision was the risk of interference in editorial policies as a result of employing a consultant to the government administration, Koka Kandiashvili to the channel and selection of “pro-Georgian” ideology⁹⁴. The general director of Maestro, Baia Gadabadze denied allegations of interference by Koka Kandiashvili in the management of the channel. Several months prior, the anchor of Tskhriani and the anchors of Subiekturi Azri Teona Gogelia and Diana Trapaidze also left the channel⁹⁵.

The journalists who left the channel talked about interference from the husband of one of the owners Maia Asatiani, Kote Gogelia in the editorial policies⁹⁶. In 2011 Kote Gogelia was one of the leaders of Georgian Party, however the party stopped its affiliation with him based on “principles of political ethics”⁹⁷. Gogelia operates businesses in Russia⁹⁸.

Maka Asatiani owns 25% of Maestro, her husband Gogelia is not one of the owners. In December 2014, the founder of the channel Mamuka Ghlonti made a statement that he was relinquishing ownership of his shares. However, according to the public registry Mamuka Ghlonti remains an owner of 15% of LTD Studia Maestro⁹⁹. Other owners of the channel are Giorgi Gachechiladze (25%), Ekaterine Akobia (5%), Levan Chikvaide (15%) and Giorgi Ebralidze (15%). Giorgi Gachechiladze said that he has not been involved in the developments at Maestro for years¹⁰⁰.

⁹¹ This Affects You calls on law enforcement to probe into alleged surveillance over journalist <http://www.transparency.ge/en/post/general-announcement/affects-you-calls-law-enforcement-probe-alleged-surveillance-over-journalist>

⁹² Zhizhilashvili: The heads of Maestro told me that the channel should become pro-Georgian [in Georgian] <http://www.netgazeti.ge/GE/105/opinion/39691/>

⁹³ Part of journalists leave Maestro [in Georgian] <http://www.civil.ge/geo/article.php?id=28983>

⁹⁴ Koka Kandiashvili dismissed from his position and appointed as a consultant to the government <http://www.netgazeti.ge/GE/105/News/26790/>

⁹⁵ Mamuka Ghlonti relinquishes ownership of Maestro [in Georgian] <http://www.netgazeti.ge/GE/105/News/39410/>

⁹⁶ Diana Trapaidze leaves the channel after talking to an owner [in Georgian] <http://www.tabula.ge/ge/story/89081-maestros-mflobeltan-shexvedris-shemdeg-diana-trapaidzem-telekompania-datova>

⁹⁷ Georgian Party stops its affiliation with Kote Gogelia [in Georgian] <http://www.netgazeti.ge/GE/79/News/6773/>

⁹⁸ Journalist detained at Russian singer Grigory Leps's Tbilisi concert <http://dfwatch.net/journalist-detained-at-russian-singer-grigory-leps-tbilisi-concert-85373-32561>

⁹⁹ Mamuka Ghlonti relinquishes ownership of Maestro [in Georgian] <http://www.netgazeti.ge/GE/105/News/39410/>

¹⁰⁰ Pro-Georgian means Pro-Russian - Journalists talk about leaving Maestro [in Georgian] <http://www.netgazeti.ge/GE/105/News/39743/>

In September 2015 LTD Studia Maestro filed for bankruptcy¹⁰¹. One of the owners of the channel Giorgi Gachechiladze accused his partners in bankrupting the company on purpose¹⁰². Maia denied the allegations.

Imedi

In June 2014, shortly after the local self-government elections, due to a decision of the founders, the head of newsroom of Imedi Baia Tsanava was dismissed from her position¹⁰³. A process of reorganization was announced at the channel and journalist Natia Abramaia was appointed to head the reorganization¹⁰⁴¹⁰⁵. In September 2014 Natia Abramia left the channel. Maia Tabagari was appointed as a head of newsroom just days later.

On 29 August 2015 Imedi made an announcement about temporary suspension of social and political shows on the channel¹⁰⁶. The shows Reaktsia (Reaction) and Imedis Kvira (Imedi's Week) were suspended from the channel. According to the official statement, the channel was planning changes to the format of the social and political shows and the new product would be available to viewers in 2016. No additional comments have been made by the leadership of the channel.

The anchor of the Reaktsia and Imedis Kvira, Inga Grigolia called the suspension of the shows a political decision. According to her, both shows had high ratings and there were no reasons for their suspension¹⁰⁷. It is noteworthy, that Grigolia had no information about suspension of her shows until the official statement of Imedi¹⁰⁸.

Several months prior to the suspension of Reaktsia and Imedis Kvira, the anchor Inga Grigolia and her colleague, co-anchor of Imedis Kvira, Eka Khoperia accused the ruling political group of attempting to interfere. In March 2015 Inga Grigolia said, that representatives of the parliamentary majority from

¹⁰¹ Maka Asatiani makes a statement [in Georgian] <http://www.interpressnews.ge/ge/sazogadoeba/346368-maka-asathiani-ganckhadabas-avrcelebs.html?ar=A>

¹⁰² Owner of 25% of Studia Maestro, Giorgi Gachechiladze accuses partners in bankrupting the company on purpose [in Georgian] <http://1tv.ge/ge/news/view/107626.html>

¹⁰³ Personnel changes at Imedi: Baia Tsanava leaves her position [in Georgian] <http://www.netgazeti.ge/GE/105/News/33036/>

¹⁰⁴ Reorganization starts at Imedi [in Georgian] <http://www.interpressnews.ge/ge/sazogadoeba/287394-gimedshiq-reformireba-itsyeba.html?ar=A>

¹⁰⁵ Natia Abramia to lead reorganization at Imedi [in Georgian] <http://www.media.ge/ge/portal/news/302960/>

¹⁰⁶ Political and social shows to be temporarily suspended on Imedi [in Georgian] <http://www.imedi.ge/index.php?pg=nws&id=54605>

¹⁰⁷ Inga Grigolia: This was a political decision to ensure that I was not on TV screens before the elections [in Georgian] <http://www.interpressnews.ge/ge/sazogadoeba/343511-inga-grigolia-es-aris-politikuri-gadatsyveteleba-ar-vyofiliyavi-ekranze-archevnebis-tsin.html?ar=A>

¹⁰⁸ Inga Grigolia cannot confirm that Imedi plans to suspend Reaktsia [in Georgian] <http://www.netgazeti.ge/GE/105/business/49380/>

Georgian Dream categorically demanded that the protest of United National Movement planned for 21 March not be covered on her show. In the same week, the anchor of Imedi's Kvira Eka Khoperia stated that "an objective Imedi was not acceptable to the government". At that time the management of the channel distanced itself from the position of the journalists and officially denied any attempts of interference from government officials¹⁰⁹.

Cable broadcasters and Internet TVs

TV channel Pirveli (former TVS)

TVS received an authorization on broadcasting in January 2015. The owner of the channel is Keteven Japaridze and the director is Paata Kakauridze. TVS was a sports channel, however in August 2015 the channel changed its name and became Pirveli¹¹⁰. TV Pirveli is included in packages of all major broadcasting transmitters (Silknet, Caucasus Online, Super TV, Global TV) and reaches at least 168,000 viewers.

Starting from September, along with sport programs, the channel will also have social and political programs. Among them is a program Rviani, anchors of which will be Nino Zhizhilashvili and Vakho Sanaia. Zhizhilashvili and Sanaia were anchors of the program Tskhriani on Maestro until the end of 2014¹¹¹.

According to media.ge, Keteven Japaridze is the wife of Vakhtang Tsereteli, son of Avtandil Tsereteli, a Georgian businessman producing cigarettes¹¹²¹¹³. According to the voter list database Vakhtang Tsereteli and Avtandil Tsereteli are registered at the same address. Keteven Japaridze and Vakhtang Tsereteli are also founders of a noncommercial legal entity Foundation for Love of Kindness¹¹⁴.

¹⁰⁹ Imedi makes an announcement regarding Inga Grigolia and Eka Khoperia [in Georgian]
<http://www.interpressnews.ge/ge/sazogadoeba/322728-telekompania-imeri-inga-grigolia-meri-da-eka-khoferiastan-dakavshrebith-ganckhadebas-avrcelebs.html?ar=A>

¹¹⁰ Facebook Page of TV Pirveli <https://www.facebook.com/TVSports.ge>

¹¹¹ Other journalists leave Imedi along with Zhizhilashvili [in Georgian]
<http://www.interpressnews.ge/ge/sazogadoeba/310290-telekompania-qmaestrosq-nino-zhizhilashvilis-garda-skhva-thanamshromlebic-toveben.html?ar=A>

¹¹² New sports channel to be launched in September <http://www.media.ge/en/portal/news/302975/>

¹¹³ TV channel TVS says start of broadcasting postponed for several months [in Georgian]
<http://www.media.ge/ge/portal/news/303208/>

¹¹⁴ Foundation for Love of Kindness, Registry of Commercial and Noncommercial Legal Entities [in Georgian]
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B1ZzGSs7RxpWVhPdGwWEJoRU0/view>

According to media reports, businessman Mindia Kashibadze has accused Avtandil Tsereteli of torture¹¹⁵. According to him, Tsereteli demanded that the relinquish ownership of the computer company Maxtop¹¹⁶.

Media Union Obiektivi

The broadcasting license of Obiektivi is owned by a noncommercial entity Media Union Obiektivi, represented by Irakli Tsilikashvili, Zurab Gogishvili, Soso Zaalishvili and Tea Nadiradze¹¹⁷. Until June 2014, the leader of Alliance of Patriots Irma Inashvili was a member of the board of NNLE Media Union Obiektivi. Inashvili, along with the other board members of Media Union Obiektivi and Bondo Mdžinarashvili, owns LTD Mediahouse Obiektivi, which until July 2013 owned the broadcasting license of Obiektivi¹¹⁸.

In the midterm elections, Irma Inashvili stood as a majoritarian candidate for Sagarejo¹¹⁹. In 2014 Alliance of Patriots received monetary and nonmonetary donations in the amount of GEL 240 000, while the whole revenue of the party amounted to almost one million GEL¹²⁰¹²¹.

Obiektivi is noteworthy for its anti-Western, xenophobic and homophobic broadcasting. The channel is available in standard packages of all major broadcasting transmission companies. Obiektivi also broadcasts through Channel 25 in Batumi¹²². In Tbilisi, Radio Obiektivi is also available on FM 105.1.

According to a study by Media Development Foundation, Media Union Obiektivi has been awarded contracts in the amount of more than GEL 50 000 from various state funded organizations in 2013-2014¹²³. The organization also implemented several projects in cooperation with administrative organs.

¹¹⁵ Mindia Kashibadze relinquished ownership of Maxtop under duress [in Georgian]
<http://www.netgazeti.ge/GE/105/News/14073/>

¹¹⁶ Georgian computers to be produced in Georgia <http://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/content/article/1542007.html>

¹¹⁷ Declaration of Conformity [in Georgian] <http://gncc.ge/uploads/other/1/1493.pdf>

¹¹⁸ Approval of transfer of licences NB62 and NB114 for private broadcasting [in Georgian]
<http://www.gncc.ge/ge/legal-acts/commission/solutions/2013-511-5.page>

¹¹⁹ Irma Inashvili named as a majoritarian candidate for Sagarejo [in Georgian]
<http://1tv.ge/ge/news/view/106741.html>

¹²⁰ Monetary contributions to political parties <http://sao.ge/files/finansuri%20monitoringi/shemocirulebebi/2014-clis-shemocirulebebi.xlsx>

¹²¹ Total revenue of political parties <http://sao.ge/files/finansuri%20monitoringi/2014-clis-statistika.xlsx>

¹²² Announcement of broadcasting through Channel 25 [in Georgian]
<http://www.obiektivi.net//resource/mauwyebloba/TV25.pdf>

¹²³ Financing of media outlets spreading anti-Western sentiments and hate speech from the state budget [in Georgian], Media Development Foundation
<http://mdfgeorgia.ge/uploads//Report%20on%20Obiektivi%20&%20others.pdf>

LTD Kartuli Arkhi (former TV Kvirike)

LTD Kartuli Arkhi (Georgian Channel) is owned by icon painter Madona Lanchava, and the director is Teimuraz Alikhanishvili. The company received a broadcasting authorization in November 2012. Madona Lanchava also owns a private school Akhali Kartuli Skola (New Georgian School) (former School Kvirike) located on Kazbegi avenue and a private kindergarten Tsitsinatela (Firefly) (50% of LTD Tsitsinatela is owned by Giorgi Girgvliani)¹²⁴¹²⁵.

Until November 2013, LTD Kartuli Arkhi was registered as TV Kvirike, and the company was owned by a deacon of St. Kvirike and Ivrita church, Giorgi Kipshidze¹²⁶. Madona Lanchava and Deacon Giorgi Kipshidze are also members of the board of the movement Kvirike. According to the website, the main mission of the movement Kvirike is to “better get to know the new generation and to bring its problems to the society”¹²⁷. Students of public and private schools can become members of the movement.

According to a TV guide, published on the website of the TV channel, the programs on the channel include: Quotes of the Patriarch, Ferial Days, Personal Growth, As a guest at Father Guram’s and etc. The anchor of Ferial Days is Nana Devdariani, whose name is associated with anti-Western organizations¹²⁸.

The channel is available in standard packages of four major broadcasting transmitters - Silknet, Caucasus Online, MagtiSat, Super TV and Global TV, making it available to at least 300,000 viewers.

The director of LTD Kartuli Arkhi, Teimuraz Alikhanishvili owns 5% of teleshopping channel LTD Mall TV, which is also a cable broadcaster. Other owners of the channel are Giorgi Gugushvili (35%) and Rati Dolidze (60%), Zurab Iobashvili is the director of the channel.

LTD Kartuli TV

LTD Kartuli TV (Georgian TV) is owned by JSC Kartuli (Georgian), Otar Shamatava is the director of the channel. JSC Kartuli was founded in December 2014. Shareholders of the company are noncommercial legal entity Kartuli Ertobis Darbazi (Hall of Georgian Unity) (95%) and a movie director Rezo Chkheidze (5%), who died in May 2015. According to the documents in the public registry the capital of the JSC is GEL 15 million¹²⁹.

¹²⁴ Website of Akhali Kartuli Skola [in Georgian] <http://axaliqartuliskola.com/index.php>

¹²⁵ Website of Tsitsinatela [in Georgian] <http://kerdzobagicinatela.com/>

¹²⁶ Archpriest Giorgi Kipshidze launched new TV company <http://www.media.ge/en/portal/news/52124/>

¹²⁷ Website of Movement Kvirike [in Georgian] http://kvirike.ge/v2/?page_id=10842

¹²⁸ Program of *Ferial Days* [Video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5tXZRcn0yY#t=27>

¹²⁹ JSC Kartuli, Registry of Commercial and Noncommercial Legal Entities <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B1ZzGSs7RxkpVnVFbU1IMnh3YVE/view>

Kartuli Ertobis Darbazi was founded in December 2014 and the board members include Ramaz Kurashvili, Rezo Chkheidze, Anzor Erkomaishvili, Arnold Gegechkori, Omar Mkheidze and Giorgi Toidze¹³⁰. According to the manifest of the organization “Kartuli Ertobis Darbazi - Kedi will be a range of ridges, upon slopes of which will rest Georgian unity, the Georgian mentality and the Georgian spirit”.

According to the website of Kartuli TV, the channel mostly transmits entertainment and educational programs¹³¹. According the websites of the broadcasting transmitters, Kartuli TV is available only in Silknet’s standard package available to around 98,500 viewers.

LTD Khariskhis Arkhi (Dro TV)

Owners of LTD Khariskhis Arkhi (Quality Channel) are Elene Melkadze (15%), Giorgi Asatiani (26%), Kartlos Asatiani (14%), Edisher Giorgobiani (4%), Marine Meparishvili (14%), Lazare Zakariadze (2%) and Malkhaz Gulashvili (25%).

According to a study published by damoukidebloba.com, Dro TV is one of the organizations connected with Eurasia Institute¹³². According to the report of Eurasia Institute, the main goal of the organization is analysis and practical support of Georgia-Russia relations¹³³. Several online media outlets are also partners of this institute: Georgia and the World (geworld.ge), Saqinform and News Agency Iverioni.

The channel was initially broadcasting under the name of Khariskhis Arkhi, in 2014 Malkhaz Gulashvili became one of the owners and the channel changed its name. Malkhaz Gulashvili is not associated with any other company or organization. He is one of the leaders of People’s Orthodox Movement, as well as an owner of 100% of LTD Media Holding Georgian Times, which publishes English-language newspaper The Georgian Times and manages a website geotimes.ge. The company is also engaged in several marketing activities¹³⁴. The director of LTD Media Holding Georgian Times and LTD Khariskhis Arkhi is Kakha Maskharashvili.

Media Holding Georgian Times owns the authorization for broadcasting. The wife of Malkhaz Gulashvili, Nino Gagua, who is an editor at The Georgian Times, also owns LTD Leader Company, which also has an authorization on broadcasting.

¹³⁰ Website of Kartuli Ertobis Darbazi <http://qartuliertobisdarbazi.blogspot.com/>

¹³¹ Website of Kartuli TV ([in Georgian] <http://www.qtv.com.ge/about.php>)

¹³² Russian Influence on Georgian Civil Society and Media [in Georgian], Damoukidebloba.com, <http://damoukidebloba.com/assets/up-modul/uploads/pdf/rusuli%20gavlana%20media%20da%20NGO-1.pdf>

¹³³ Five Years of Eurasia Institute - Midterm Report [in Georgian] <http://geurasia.org/panel/uploads/PDF/5-weli-qartuli-saboloo.pdf>

¹³⁴ Georgian Times, About Us <http://geotimes.ge/index.php/ge/2014-04-24-20-33-43>

Marina Meparishvili is an owner and a director of LTD Art Radio. Former director of Art Radio Irakli Dateshidze was at the same time a director of Radio Voice of Abkhazia (Media Center for Open Abkhazia)¹³⁵. The owner of 26% of Dro TV is also the technical director of Voice of Abkhazia. Another owner of Dro TV Kartlos Asatiani is a shareholder and director of several companies, among them he is a director of a computer shop Orion Technologies¹³⁶.

According to the website of Dro TV, the company has several programs Language, Motherland Faith and Religion and Science¹³⁷. The channel is available in standard packages of Silknet, Caucasus Online and Magtiset, covering at least 250,000 viewers.

LTD International News Agency Eurasia (New Georgia)

The owner and director of the TV Company Akhali Sakartvelo (New Georgia) is Hamlet Gegia. Hamlet Gegia is a board member of several noncommercial legal entities: Press Ombudsman, Civil Movement Alliance of Generations, Creative Union of Georgian Youth Iberioni, and Creative Union of Georgian Journalists. Members of this union are the editor of the newspaper Asaval-Dasavali Lasha Nadareishvili, editor-in-chief of geworld.ge Irakli Todua, the Honorary Member of Georgia's Royal Club Pridon Dochia and etc.¹³⁸. The channel began broadcasting in February 2015.

Revenue of entities authorized on broadcasting (June 2013-2015)

Authorized Entity	Revenue (GEL)
Media Union Obiektivi (former Media House Obiektivi)	992939
LTD Kartuli TV	11518
TV Pirveli Arkhi (former TVS)	93287 (January-June 2015)
LTD Kartuli Arkhi	25181
Dro TV	70701
Mall TV	4875
Akhali Sakartvelo	0

¹³⁵ GNCC gets acquainted with radio broadcasting license competition participants' documentation <http://www.media.ge/en/portal/news/301085/>

¹³⁶ Facebook page of Orion Technologies <https://www.facebook.com/oriontech.ge>

¹³⁷ Website of Dro TV <http://qch.ge/>

¹³⁸ Page of Honorary Member of Georgia's Royal Club, Pridon Dochia [in Georgian] <http://www.georoyal.ge/?MTID=5&TID=92&id=2827>

Patriot TV

Patriot TV is an online broadcaster, with its own Facebook page and Youtube channel (January 2015)¹³⁹¹⁴⁰. According to information provided to us by Patriot TV, the owners of the channel are Giorgi Iremadze and Giorgi Kokhroidze. There are 10-12 people working on the programs, who do not get any remuneration. Patriot TV does not have any revenue.

According to damoukidebloba.com, the channel was founded by Society of Erekle II and Eurasian Choice¹⁴¹. The founders of Eurasian Choice are Maia Khinchagashvili, Archil Chkhoidze and Boris Manjukov. Maia Khinchagashvili is also a director of Davit Soslani Society, Archil Chkhoidze is the head of Society of Erekle II.

According to the website of Society of Erekle II, the main goal of the organization is to restore good neighbourhood relations with Russia¹⁴². 24 of October 2015 pro-Russian demonstration was held in front of presidential palace. One of the event organizers was the Society of Erekle II. The main demand of demonstrators was restoration of relation with Russia and military neutrality¹⁴³.

The society made an announcement about the foundation of an Internet TV in 2011¹⁴⁴. The Internet TV founded then was called Medlis Ori Mkhare (Two Sides of a Coin). A program with the same name is now broadcasted on Patrioti TV and the anchor is Archil Chkhoidze. The head of the project is Giorgi Iremadze. On 20 March 2014, the Society of Erekle II made an announcement on its Facebook page that the program Medlis Ori Mkhare would be broadcasted on Kartuli TV as well. The programs of Patrioti TV are shared by Georgia and the World.

¹³⁹ Facebook page of Patriot TV

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/%E1%83%9E%E1%83%90%E1%83%A2%E1%83%A0%E1%83%98%E1%83%9D%E1%83%A2%E1%83%98-TV/789751564445062>

¹⁴⁰ Youtube Channel of Patriot TV https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCleCNK9W552Y_Lxwb1kGsfA/featured

¹⁴¹ Russian Influence on Georgian Civil Society and Media [in Georgian], Damoukidebloba.com, <http://damoukidebloba.com/assets/up-modul/uploads/pdf/rusuli%20gavlena%20media%20da%20NGO-1.pdf>

¹⁴² Society of Erekle II, About Us [in Georgian] <http://erekle-2.ge/index.php/ka/aboutus>

¹⁴³ pro-Russian demonstration and contraction in front of President palace - netgazeti.ge <http://www.netgazeti.ge/GE/105/News/50237/>

¹⁴⁴ Announcement about a new internet TV [Video] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=72&v=jaqBnVuYkZc>



Transparency International Georgia
Tbilisi, October 2015