

# **Transition of Georgian State Television into the Public Broadcaster**

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## Abstract

The thesis aims at exploring the degree of change of Georgian state television transiting into the public broadcaster. Thesis measures the transition through 6 criteria within which it analyzes the importance and effectiveness of public service broadcasting in Georgian media:

- Legal definition;
- Management appointment;
- Funding;
- Mission;
- Preventing intervention;
- Public trust/audience.

The case of Georgia is grounded in a general process of post-communist transformation through media liberalization. Thesis explores the conception of public broadcasting and difficulties of its successful establishment in East/Central Europe.

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*Dedicated to mom, dad, Dzio and to my dear friends Zura and Mariam.*

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## Introduction

The thesis aims at exploring to what degree has the Georgian state television transformed into public broadcaster. For measuring the degree of change I have come up with 6 criteria: 1. legal definition; 2. management appointment; 3. funding; 4. mission; 5. preventing intervention; 6. and audience share/trust. I realize that 'a satisfactory theory of a comprehensive social process can be elaborated only after the process is over'.<sup>1</sup> But I think four years after the establishment of Georgian public broadcaster is a good time for conceptualizing the process. Exploring this field is interesting because the occurrence of the institution is recent, inviting whole Georgian society express diverse opinions about it and also it is a good time to see whether the institution is going on the path of becoming a western type of independent organization.

My intention is to analyze the literature on public broadcasting, mainly in the direction of post-communist transformation in Central and Easter Europe through which one sees serious difficulties and challenges for a successful introduction of public broadcasters. In the thesis I will discuss these difficulties and tendencies in the region towards media liberalization process.

I see myself contributing into the rich literature on media system change and the establishment of public service broadcasting institutions in Central and Eastern European countries through grounding the Georgian case in this theoretical framework. My case is relevant because little has been written on Georgian media especially on Georgian public broadcaster and its importance in Georgian media while Georgia has been following the major tendencies in the region in terms of media wars for its independence and establishment of new democratic media institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> Rudolf Prevratil, *Czechoslovakia, Glasnost and After: Media and Change in Central and Eastern Europe*, (Hampton Press, Inc. Cresskill, New Jersey, 1995): 149

In contrast with major thoughts and prospects towards a successful introduction of public broadcasters in Eastern Europe I have a more positivist approach towards the recent media developments in Georgia as based on conceptual frames in general and my 6 criteria in particular.

The major finding of my research is that though the establishment of the Georgian public broadcaster is followed with certain setbacks such as a rule of funding which effects the independence of the institution and the low audience share/trust which declines the effectiveness of the television, the establishment of the public broadcaster itself is contributing to the post-communist transformation and is essential in process of the democratization of the country and the media. Other than that the television as the research shows below has gone through a serious transformation and is going on a right path of becoming a truly democratic institution. It is also worth noting here that there is a unique media environment in Georgia in terms of there is a need and niche of the television like public broadcaster which will be oriented on reporting politically balanced information and develop valuable programs.

As a methodology I have read the literature on post-communist transformation in terms of media democratization and media system change. For implementing my research I have conducted interviews with people working on the development of public broadcaster as well as people working inside the institution. I also talked with so called `outsiders`, bearing a more balanced opinion about achievements of the broadcaster, evaluating and observing the institution. For learning more about the process of continuity I have worked on the Law on Broadcasting, several memoranda and documents created in the field and reports conducted by the local and international organizations.

The first chapter intends to explore the post-communist transformation in terms of media democratization. It gives an overview of `media wars` for media independence in East/Central European countries and analyzes the difficulties of a successful introduction of public service broadcasting in the region. The second chapter gives an overview of recent political history of Georgia and main media characteristics. The third chapter explores the transition of Georgian state television into the public broadcaster through 6 criteria.

## Chapter 1 – The Literature Review

The chapter below aims at exploring the conception of public broadcaster as opposed to state and commercial televisions. It discusses the post-communist transformation in terms of media system change/democratization, showing the tendency of media struggles for its independence and liberation. And finally shows the establishment of public service broadcasting and difficulties of its successful introduction in East/Central Europe.

### **1.1 Introducing the Conception of Public Broadcasting**

‘Public service broadcasting is a vital element of democracy in Europe’.<sup>2</sup> The institution is distinguished from the broadcasting serving for commercial or political reasons with its specific task to operate independently of any political or economic intervention. Public broadcaster has a mission to provide whole society with ‘information, culture, education and entertainment, enhances social, political and cultural citizenship and stimulates the cohesion of society’.<sup>3</sup> For this end public broadcaster guarantees ‘editorial independence and impartiality’; provides ‘qualified’ and diverse programs and serves for the needs of ‘all groups’ in the society and is publicly accountable.

‘Universality, diversity and independence remain today, like yesterday, essential goals for public broadcasting. To these three principles must be added a fourth, particularly important when the public broadcaster exists side by side with commercial broadcasters: distinctiveness’.<sup>4</sup> The coexistence of public and commercial televisions on the one hand has contributed to the innovative and diverse ‘content offer’ and affected the quality of programs in a positive way. On

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<sup>2</sup> Report on Public service broadcasting, Committee on Culture, Science and Education, Document 10029, 12 January 2004 (accessed at <http://assembly.coe.int/Documents/WorkingDocs/doc04/EDOC10029.htm> on May 25)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Price, Monroe and Raboy, Marc (ed), Public Service Broadcasting: Principles and Issues, *Public Service Broadcasting in Transition*, (Kluwer Law International, The Hague/London/New York, 2003): 2



the other hand commercial televisions are trying to reduce the competition from public broadcasters to a minimum.

Public service broadcasting was born in Western Europe and has evolved by adapting itself naturally to the needs of a mature democracy. In Central and Eastern Europe it is not yet socially embedded since it was “transplanted” into an environment that lacked the necessary political and management culture, in which civil society is still weak and has inadequate resources and little dedication to public service values.<sup>5</sup> In some post-communist countries the process of transforming state TV’s into public TV’s has not yet started. In other countries broadcasting faces crisis, which is mainly caused by political and economic interests, by increasing competition from commercial media, by media concentrations and by financial difficulties.<sup>6</sup>

Public broadcasting is a means for the community to invest in the production and mediation of pluralistic programming, without regard for its market value.<sup>7</sup> It is also a means for the society to express and discuss the matters and issues important and interesting for it. For serving this end public broadcaster needs to achieve and retain a significant share and meaningful presence in the social, public and cultural debate and communication.<sup>8</sup>

Public broadcaster must serve as a watchdog of the authorities; it must be the force enabling the effective working of a pluralist democracy. It must include media content which preserves and develops cultural diversity, identity and culture - not just “high culture”, but culture generally. It has an important educational role to perform.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Report on Public service broadcasting, Committee on Culture, Science and Education, Document 10029, 12 January 2004 (accessed at <http://assembly.coe.int/Documents/WorkingDocs/doc04/EDOC10029.htm> on May 25)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

## 1.2 Media System Change in Central and East European Countries

Print press and broadcast media liberation in Central Europe started in 1980s and 1990s and was connected to the political transformation process of the same period. The majority of the newspaper market became `privatized and pluralized`<sup>10</sup>. This process included less the broadcast media since the new elite was not in favor of critical media. This is a direct reflection of this region's lack of `democratic political culture`<sup>11</sup> due to the communist past. It turned out to be very difficult to `throw off old habits`<sup>12</sup> by changing the system and elites accordingly. The media at that time served as a `weapon` of the government, which means that the media was highly controlled and journalists strongly `partisan`.

`The first wave of media reform`<sup>13</sup> had two achievements: state media formally transformed to public broadcasting on the one hand with its funds, and second, commercial media was established on the other as opposed to the monopolized sector. This very reform played an essential role in the democratization of the media and also on the political democratization of East Central Europe. Nevertheless, Sukosd and Bajomi suggest that the East Central European media reformation and democratization remains an `open-ended, normatively oriented project`<sup>14</sup>. Taking a historical perspective of the region Sukosd and Jakubowicz<sup>15</sup> suggest that a few more decades may be needed for the development of `supportive political culture and democratic media institutions, including public service media`. Many of those

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<sup>10</sup>Miklos Sukosd and Peter Bajomi, The second wave of media reform in East Central Europe, Reinventing Media, Media Policy Reform in East-Central Europe, Central European University, 2003: 13

<sup>11</sup>Ibid 13

<sup>12</sup> Miklos Sukosd and Peter Bajomi, The second wave of media reform in East Central Europe, Reinventing Media, Media Policy Reform in East-Central Europe, Central European University, 2003: 13

<sup>13</sup> Ibid 14

<sup>14</sup> Ibid 15

<sup>15</sup> Jakubowicz, Karol and Sukosd Miklos (ed), Twelve Concepts Regarding Media System Evolution and Democratization in Post-Communist Societies, *Finding the Right Place on the Map: Central and Eastern European Media Change in a Global Perspective*. (Bristol, London: Intellect Books, 2008) (forthcoming): 24

difficulties that these countries face had been overcome by Western countries (but in a relatively longer time), while other problems are characteristic of the region. Traumas that post-communist countries face include:

- `anticlimax` of post-1989 years when the fall of communist system did not solve much problems and when the new leaders did not occur averse to corruption and arrogance themselves;
- Ideas/ideals of the forces in opposition of communist ideology did not turn out to be practical and useful;
- Eventually the true nature of capitalism was revealed;
- European unification did not turn out to be as much `joyful` as expected;
- `Westification` as the only valuable path for the Eastern Europe.<sup>16</sup>

21<sup>st</sup> century brought a list of new traumas for post-communist societies as:

- Social inequalities;
- Job insecurity;
- Threat of unemployment;
- Decreased sovereignty of national governments in transnational investments;
- Ethnic tensions.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Jakubowicz, Karol and Sukosd Miklos (ed), Twelve Concepts Regarding Media System Evolution and Democratization in Post-Communist Societies, *Finding the Right Place on the Map: Central and Eastern European Media Change in a Global Perspective*. (Bristol, London: Intellect Books, 2008) (forthcoming): 26

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 26

These lists can be expanded many times and the question will remain unanswered: will Eastern and Central European societies cope with all these as new challenges are underway?

### **1.3 Media Wars in Post-Communist Countries**

‘Media wars’ meaning continuous struggles for media independence from governments, oppositions, politicians and businessmen, are essential the part of media system transformation. They are important in sense that they have paved the way for democratic media institutions.

‘Such media wars included fights by various clan media and several phases of struggle against control and for independence ...’<sup>18</sup> There was a strike in Czech television in January 2001 struggling for public broadcasting. The strikers were demanding a new law for ‘financial transparency and for editorial independence’<sup>19</sup> at least from political groups. The government was afraid that the strike could shake the country’s image abroad. So the event was followed by political consensus to improve the standing of public broadcasting. The strike became the significant turning point about the role of the public media in the Czech Republic as well as of the relationship between journalists and politicians.

In 1994 the Polish president Walesa dismissed the public broadcaster’s chairman and two other members of the council. The act of the president turned out to be without legal authorization. Accordingly the law was amended in a way that only council members could elect or dissolve the chairman as well as other members of the broadcaster. Before the new broadcasting laws the appointment of public television management in Poland was the job of the president. According to the new law, such appointments shifted to be the mandate of parliaments or parliamentary committees.

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<sup>18</sup>Jakubowicz, Karol and Sukosd Miklos (ed), Twelve Concepts Regarding Media System Evolution and Democratization in Post-Communist Societies, *Finding the Right Place on the Map: Central and Eastern European Media Change in a Global Perspective*. (Bristol, London: Intellect Books, 2008) (forthcoming): 4

<sup>19</sup> Price, Monroe, Public Service Broadcasting in Transition, Kluwer Law International, 2003: 142

In 2005-2007 there were protests in Poland against `pressure being put on public and independent media and against ultimately unsuccessful attempts to vet journalists for possible history of collaboration with Communist-time secret police, with the threat that they would be banned from journalistic profession for 10 years if they refused to submit to this`.<sup>20</sup>

Hungary was advancing rapidly in the post-Communist transition process though there was an intense control over the media by political elites. The clash between the political parties and televisions lasted for a long time. In early years of the transition the president of Hungary could easily appoint or remove the head of Hungarian Television. During 1990s Hungarian media wars around public broadcasting became `focal conflicts of political struggles`.<sup>21</sup>

In five years the Hungarian public broadcaster has had 9 presidents and its audience fell below 10 percent. The crisis on television was partly caused by the inadequacies of the Media Law `which had laid down rules about advertising revenue at a time when Hungarian television was still dominant in the market and did not consider the impact of introducing two other terrestrial broadcasters in 1997`.<sup>22</sup> At the same time the channel has gone in debt and there was a Hungarian government covering all the costs. In the eye of people the broadcaster was a representative of the government.

After the passage of the new Law on Broadcasting in these countries the management appointment mechanisms looked in a following way:

In the Czech Republic:

- parliament appoints the public service television board;

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<sup>20</sup> Jakubowicz, Karol and Sukosd Miklos (ed), Twelve Concepts Regarding Media System Evolution and Democratization in Post-Communist Societies, *Finding the Right Place on the Map: Central and Eastern European Media Change in a Global Perspective*. (Bristol, London: Intellect Books, 2008) (forthcoming): 4

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 4

<sup>22</sup> Price, Monroe, Public Service Broadcasting in Transition, Kluwer Law International, 2003: 135

- television board appoints Chair;
- television board appoints the General Manager;
- parliament and television board together dismiss Board/General Manager;
- parliament can influence the Board.

In Poland:

- broadcasting board appoints the public service television board;
- broadcasting board appoints Chair;
- same person chairs the Board and is General Manager;
- broadcasting board can dismiss Board/General Manager;
- political majority influences the board.

In Hungary:

- parliament and civil society together appoint the public service television board;
- parliament appoints Chair;
- television board appoints General Manager;
- television board and parliament dismiss Board/General Manager;
- political majority influences the board.<sup>23</sup>

As Jakubowitz writes the passage of the new broadcasting law in East-Central European countries did far less than expected, but what was important is that it led to the establishment of private televisions. The competitive environment was expected to impact their democratization process more than the formal broadcasting laws.

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<sup>23</sup> Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, From state to public service: the failed reform of state television in Central Eastern Europe, Reinventing Media, Media Policy Reform in East-Central Europe, Central European University, 2003: 46

Hungarian law for public broadcaster demands 15 percent of total time to be devoted to national films and 70 percent to European productions. 50 percent of Hungarian programs must be nationally produced compared to the Polish and where the quota is 30 percent.

Polish and Hungarian public televisions have an obligation to provide programs for their Diasporas, which as Jakubowitz says, is a heavy burden on their budgets. After the dissolution of the Czech and Slovak federation the federal law does not set quotas but demands that the broadcasters are to work in a way to preserve cultural identities of `nations, nationalities and ethnic groups`. The Polish law on the broadcasting legislature seems more democratic, free from the political intervention from two other countries, but the reality is such that for some televisions it was easier to establish themselves in other countries and `take advantage of a more liberal local broadcasting environment`. <sup>24</sup>

Monroe Price argues along with the Czech example that there has to be a review of Czech Television and its management and he gives some suggestions which I think could be applicable to the other two countries as well.

- `Rapid implementation of the new law for public television and the creation of a transparent process for nomination, selection and Parliamentary confirmation of civil society representatives to sit on the TV Council;
- Introducing of strict controls and a transparent and accountable process of financial administration, including openness in tendering and awarding of contracts and public disclosure of such information;

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<sup>24</sup> Price, Monroe, *Public Service Broadcasting in Transition*, Kluwer Law International, 2003: 150

- Introduction of structures for internal pluralism to assess and strengthen quality of content , particularly in news and current affairs, including the adoption of an editorial statute guaranteeing editorial independence and allowing journalists and other media professionals the right to act according to conscience`.<sup>25</sup>

Western European countries remain supporting PSB organizations in post-Communist countries, which is not a force enough to model these institutions in a western manner. What East-Central European countries decided to do in a very short time it took several decades for the Western Europe to implement the media system evolution. Can media democratization be achieved in East-Central European countries? It can be achieved, but only then when the Central European media has nothing to do with the Communist system legacy, which, as Jakubowicz argues, is quite some time away.

So far public service broadcastings in post-Communist countries are seen to be far from keeping the promise of being independent and politically impartial. They also fail in serving the public interest, producing diverse and pluralistic programs. Many of the stations are in debt which affects the quality of the programs in a bad way and causes the fall of their audience share. These difficulties are accompanied by the problems of a more `fundamental nature`: `lack of social embeddedness of the idea of public service broadcasting and lack of a social constituency willing and able to support public service broadcasters and buttress its autonomy and independence`.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Price, Monroe, *Public Service Broadcasting in Transition*, Kluwer Law International, 2003: 143

<sup>26</sup> Jakubowitz, Rivera on Baltic? *Public Service Broadcasting in Post-Communist Countries*, (Media and Democracy, Required Readings, Political Science, Miklos Sukosd, Central European University, 2007/2008): 14



## **1.4 Problems for a Successful Introduction of Public Broadcasting**

### **Organizations**

The story of the PSB is a part of a larger media system transformation process. `Failed project` as many analysts describe its establishment is based on two things. First, after the dissolution of the Soviet regime the countries comprising the Union went through a rapid institutional change which affected the effectiveness of newly established institutions in a bad manner. Second, all the revolutionary projects of reforming or establishing a new system was carried out in a very `unstable social and political environment`<sup>27</sup>, societies being in search of alternative ideology and identity.

`In just one decade public television in former Communist countries evolved from being a powerful state propaganda instrument [...] to an instrument of popular liberation [...] and finally to a position of increasingly minor media and political relevance`.<sup>28</sup>

Achille Yves classifies three problems that public broadcasters are facing in East-Central European countries:

1. `identity crisis` - public broadcasters in these countries have a hard time in identifying and justifying to what purpose they serve;
2. `financial crisis` - it is not clear on what basis financing television is secured. For maintaining its political independence, Yves suggests the PSB should increase advertising revenues, but this way it shifts close to the commercial television;

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<sup>27</sup> Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, From state to public service: the failed reform of state television in Central Eastern Europe, Reinventing Media, Media Policy Reform in East-Central Europe, Central European University, 2003: 31

<sup>28</sup> Ibid 31

3. `organizational crisis` - PSB organizations are not ready to meet the present financial and programming challenges. All the organizational difficulties hinder the motivation and creativity of the staff.<sup>29</sup>

Pippidi argues that the crisis of European public service television is conceptual. In the state monopoly era, in East Central European countries, television was perceived as a public good providing audience with educative, informative and entertaining programs. However, in the competitive environment where there is more than one channel in the market, it is impossible for one public broadcaster to cover everything from `entertainment to news`<sup>30</sup>. There are philosophical debates on the notion and function of public broadcaster whether it has to provide `diversity of programming, provision for minorities and disadvantaged, sustaining an informed electorate, and cultural and educational enrichment`.<sup>31</sup> But this is not the case when referring to PSB's unsuccessful introduction. Karol Jakubowicz defines the condition of `state of crisis` of the PSB organizations naming the following problems:

- `media legislation;
- political pressures;
- the weakness of civil society;
- traditional and badly designed organizational and management structures;
- frequent management and leadership crises;
- lack of funds and programming know-how

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<sup>29</sup>Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, *From state to public service: the failed reform of state television in Central Eastern Europe, Reinventing Media, Media Policy Reform in East-Central Europe*, Central European University, 2003: 36

<sup>30</sup>Ibid. 37

<sup>31</sup>Robert Avery, *Public Service Broadcasting in Multichannel Environment*, Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data, 1993: xiii

- small television and advertising markets [...]
- self-censorship of journalists and program-makers;
- inadequate dedication of the staff to PSB values [...].<sup>32</sup>

There is a question whether these are `teething` problems accompanying the establishment of PSB in the transition period, or whether the situation is more serious. The thing is that all the Central and Eastern European countries had an idealistic approach towards establishing PSB organizations. They had very optimistic expectations that it would be possible that the media institutions could operate without any obligatory social, political or cultural context. They also believed that it would be easy that PSB institutions could be detached from politics, in terms of belonging to the political parties and also journalists could operate in a western manner, being isolated from politicization forms. Most importantly they believed they would transform state televisions to PSB organizations with the latter's ability of holding their own in a competitive market.

It can be argued that as much as post-Communist countries' expectations were high and illusory towards a successful introduction of the public broadcasting televisions they did little in terms of preparation for supporting and fighting for their institutional ends from any intervention. They believed that the competitive media environment as well as politicians would be kindly welcoming the new democratic organization. On the contrary the `commercial media sector [was] [...] orchestrating a mounting campaign against PSB`.<sup>33</sup> So did political leaders hardly show any support towards the ideals of public broadcasting. On the one hand politicians

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<sup>32</sup> Jakubowitz, Karol, Ideas in our Heads: Introduction of PSB as Part of Media System Change in Central and Eastern Europe, *European Journal of Communication* 19 (1): 63

<sup>33</sup> Jakubowitz, Karol, Ideas in our Heads: Introduction of PSB as Part of Media System Change in Central and Eastern Europe, *European Journal of Communication* 19 (1): 66

proclaimed media freedom; on the other hand, they were seeking for appropriate instruments of controlling it.

Pippidi writes that PSB institutions can effectively compete with commercial televisions if the former maintains a specific role and identity, something distinct from other channels. He stresses that '[g]ood television is competitive television'.<sup>34</sup> Many claim that public broadcaster has nothing to do with market and competition that it has its own path to go. Pippidi says this opinion is wrong. BBC since 1950 has been dealing with competitive market. It was also the first public television to discover that ratings are important not in terms of 'advertising revenues, but in terms of influence, legitimacy and finally as the primary source of consumer feedback'.<sup>35</sup>

Pippidi also suggests that for public service broadcasters to be the 'trustees of the nation' they must be:

- 'politically and financially independent;
- create legal mechanisms allowing for dynamic management in a context of growing and aggressive competition;
- adapt their strategies to the rapid evolution of their environment, streamline their operations, reduce operating costs, and increase creative productivity;
- draw on reliable, diversified, adequate and evolutionary funding, both public and commercial, irrespective of the form [of public broadcaster.].<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, *From state to public service: the failed reform of state television in Central Eastern Europe*, Reinventing Media, Media Policy Reform in East-Central Europe, Central European University, 2003: 59

<sup>35</sup> Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, *From state to public service: the failed reform of state television in Central Eastern Europe*, Reinventing Media, Media Policy Reform in East-Central Europe, Central European University, 2003: 59

<sup>36</sup> Ibid 41

This chapter aimed at showing the general process of post communist transformation and media liberalization in Eastern Europe as well as the establishment of public broadcasting organizations in this region. The purpose of this part was to show the major tendencies in this region in terms of media liberalization so that I could ground my case of research in a general process, and compare/contrast with certain cases and processes.

## **Chapter 2 – A Survey of Georgian Contemporary Politics and Media**

The aim of this chapter is to inform the reader about the recent political and media history of Georgia. The reason I have put this two together is that they affect on each other and it is difficult to comprehend one without knowing under what level of development is the other.

### ***2.1 An Overview of Georgian Modern Political History***

Georgia was a part of Soviet Union where the letter's purpose was to create a modern industrial state out of agrarian Russian empire. As in other soviet republics, in Georgia too industrialization, secularization, bureaucratization, and urbanization were implemented. The main fault of the process turned out to be the fact that it ignored the most significant feature of the modernization: the institutional or functional differentiation. Instead of creating something new and revolutionary the soviet regime developed as something what was before, traditional, authoritarian system. Namely in soviet countries the state had a monopoly over everything altogether: politics, economics, legislature, science, art, media, etc. whereas in democratic states there were no dogmas determining the political and social lives of people which led them to diverse and free societies.

National mobilization in Georgia, against the communist regime and for independence, started from 1989. In 1991 Georgia declared its independence, but this period did not occur as very successful both for society and for the first president of the country Zviad Gamsakhurdia since he turned out to be continuing the soviet tendencies in terms of non-compromising character and alienating from his supporters. `One of Gamsakhurdia's first priorities was to try to

concentrate as much power as possible in his own hands<sup>37</sup>. Nevertheless he was successful in accumulating the Georgian ethno nationalism against the Soviet *nomenklatura* and pro building an independent state. The regime of president Gamsakhurdia could not be established because of the shortage of time. Later there was a saying: what is the difference between the rule of Gamsakhurdia and Shevardnadze? Answer: they did not let the first rule but let the second. But the tendency of the regime was more `populist` and `infantile` thus, heading to the unstable system.

After that there was a period of chaos and war in 1992-93 followed by the Shevardnadze era which brought hope in the beginning promoting the democratic way of political life and eventually turned in to a very closed and corrupt regime. In 1995 Shevardnadze was conceived as an irreplaceable alternative since neither parties engaged in civil war was bringing any hope in terms of implementing democratic tasks. Shevardnadze managed to end the civil war. But he gave the control of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to Russia and became the member of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) which partly meant returning to a Russian dominated state. Shevardnadze had a political appeal too, at the time of his presidency Georgia became the subject of International Law. In 1999 Georgia left CIS security treaty and became the member of the European council.

Eventually Shevardnadze did not turn out to be holding a strategic and long term plans. He did not contribute in favor of developing an effective democratic institutions in the country. By the end of his presidency Georgia looked like `mafia dominated state` with the criminal-like police holding an unlimited power. The country was evaluated as a `weak state` by the end of his

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<sup>37</sup> Jonathan Wheatley, `Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution: Delayed Transition in the Former Soviet Union`, *ASHGATE*, 2005, p. 54

presidency, 1996-2001, 'first because of the ubiquitous corruption that existed within the very fabric of the state, and secondly because of the state's incapacity to provide public goods'.<sup>38</sup>

Many stayed supporting Sevardnadze till his resign; nevertheless this was the very time when the building of civil society, free media, and independent political institutions started as opposed to the oppressive political system. By the end of 2000 there were estimated to be nearly four thousand non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Georgia registered on the basis of the November 1997 Civil Code.<sup>39</sup> The more repressive the answer from the government was, more mobilized and united the society was becoming against the political system.

In November 2003, fraudulent parliamentary elections triggered wide public protests that ended in the resignation of President Shevardnadze and brought to power a new generation of Georgian politicians led by the charismatic Mikheil Saakashvili. There is a consensus in the ruling elite on building a liberal democracy and protecting the rule of law. The new government declared joining North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) as its strategic goals and embarked on an ambitious reform program. It focused its activities on rooting out corruption and developing effective state institutions.<sup>40</sup> A strategic success was achieved in May 2004 in the Autonomous Republic of Adjara, where the local autocratic regime was removed as the result of a democratic revolution supported from Tbilisi, the capital.

The role of media was huge in terms of illegitimate government resistance propaganda. There were three main national channels by the end of Shevardnadze's presidency: Channel 1 and Channel 2, run by the state (strongly pro-government) and independent channel Rustavi-2. The latter was broadcasting a lot of materials critical both to president Shevardnadze and of the

<sup>38</sup> Jonathan Wheatley, 'Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution: Delayed Transition in the Former Soviet Union', *ASHGATE*, 2005: 135

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 145

<sup>40</sup> Freedom House Country Report, Georgia (2006) accessed at <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=47&nit=402&year=2006> on May 28



government. It would host live television debates between politicians and different parties who were given a chance of sharing their political opinions with the society. Rustavi 2 broadcasted a highly unflattering cartoon animation of the president everyday, which became very popular. By 2001 media had become a valued institution in the eyes of the Georgian public. It had become hard for political leaders, no matter how critical the programs were, to dismantle it. As the counter-reaction to the 2001 raid on Rustavi-2 showed that the Georgian society (or at least part of it) was prepared to mobilize to defend the independent press from an unpopular government. Rustavi-2 played a `crucial role in the “Rose Revolution”, which swept Shevardnadze from power in November 2003. <sup>41</sup>

Jonathan Wheatley in his book `Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution` gives three reasons which caused the internal tensions and produced the swirl of event in Tbilisi. First, there was a lack of political elite cohesion in the state structure by the end of 2001. There even was confusion within state bodies whether to abide by national laws or `internal regulations`. Second, state weakness, in the eye of the population, the government had completely lost the legitimacy. Third, ineffective `representation`, elections were unable to provide Georgian citizens with any real influence over the political elite, because their results were mostly altered by electoral fraud.

However, these rapid achievements were accompanied by certain setbacks in the democratic balance of power. Years after the revolution, there was still no credible opposition to the United National Movement, the party that came to power after the Rose Revolution. There is a saying that the power spoils. So for maintaining a just state it is not sufficient that the just people ruled the state, for this end there has to be appropriate institutions. The major challenge

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<sup>41</sup> Jonathan Wheatley, `Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution: Delayed Transition in the Former Soviet Union`, *ASHGATE*, 2005, p.154

for Saakashvili's government remains the dilemma of authoritarianism and the rule of law and the balance of liberalism and democracy.<sup>42</sup>

Many political analysts argue that the civil society does not look as strong as it used to be under Shevardnadze in part because many people in the civil society moved to governmental posts and Georgian civil society as a social actor was really a relatively small network of people. Half of that network is now in the government. So it was weakened in that sense. Political scientist Ghia Nodia stresses that 'it was much easier to look strong when you had ... weak Shevardnadze government, which did not have real conviction ... And now you have this very strong-willed government, which basically shares the same values as the civil society, although they cut corners sometimes in a way that is unacceptable to civil society. So, civil society tries to be persistent in its message, but it does not have its own independent social base, so that it is difficult for it to make its voice heard. So for the civil society it's still, in the short run at least, to work in coordination with Western institutions, although at the same time trying to reach out more to a broader social base'<sup>43</sup>. He argues that civil society has less of an access to the media, both because the media thinks that the civil society organizations are less important than they used to be before and they were seen as kind of informal partners of the opposition. And also, the media, especially electronic, which is most influential, has become, for different reasons, some kind of reluctant to upset the government too much. 'But that does not mean of course that civil society has lost access to the media. And I think there is this sense that civil society and independent media's interests are related, that they are in the same boat'<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> Davit Darchiashvili, Ten Questions on Georgian Political Development, 'Society and Politics', (Caucasian Institute of Peace, Democracy and Development): 12

<sup>43</sup> Georgia: Analyst Ghia Nodia Assesses Saakashvili's Attempts To Transform Country, RadioFreeEurope RadioLiberty (accessed Jan 18, 2008)

<sup>44</sup> Georgia: Analyst Ghia Nodia Assesses Saakashvili's Attempts To Transform Country, RadioFreeEurope RadioLiberty (accessed Jan 18, 2008)

The present political system in Georgia is not stable today. It highly depends on several liberal-thinking leaders one of them is president Saakashvili. But for establishing liberal democratic institutions it is not sufficient. There has to be liberal parties, independent judiciary, strong civil society, network of community organizations, the body of professional public workers and strong and independent media.

## ***2.2 An Overview of Georgian Modern Media***

By the end of Shevardnadze presidency 2000-2003, Georgian media landscape was as follows: there were two popular televisions channel 1 (state TV), explicitly biased, always standing in favor of the government and Rustavi 2 independent and very oppositional one. I see the popularity of these channels as the advertisers were equally giving commercials to no other channels but both of these channels equally. So the money circulating in the media was disseminated between these two. The ideological and political division of these televisions divided the society into two: those watching and sharing the values of the channel 1 and those supporting Rustavi 2.

Rustavi 2 as stressed above did its best in bringing down the non-democratic government. It was profiled and had the mission of ending the presidency of Shevardnadze when the latter's vices were publicly revealed. The channel was successful in pursuing its objectives. But after the new government came, it became difficult for Rustavi 2 to keep that mission and time by time it became a regular channel not different from other televisions. Channel 1, after the rose revolution and the change of the government became very unpopular and untrustworthy in the eyes of the audience.

According to the Freedom House Country Reports 2005 Georgia has approximately 200 independent newspapers and 7 independent televisions stations, 3 of which have national

coverage. Freedom House assesses Georgian media as partly free and the numbers specifying the degree of freedom vary from 54-57.

In 2005 it can be argued that large amount of media, printed press as well as electronic is pro governmental since the government subsidizes most of the newspapers and some of the broadcasting stations too. At this time there is a severe lack of advertising revenues. Approximately 5 million dollars were circulating in the market which obviously is enough neither for electronic media nor for the printed press.<sup>45</sup> In coming years as the number of politically opposed people as well as oppositional parties increased several oppositional businessmen became interested in financing and buying media. So has the radicalization and oppositionalization of both printed press and televisions started.

Here I want to characterize the media environment in Georgia today. It is noteworthy that some of the features are typical for the region as carrying the burden of post-communist heritage, while others are typical for Georgia.

First, the major source of receiving information is television. All the researches, held within last 10 years, show that it is television from which more than 90 per cent of the society gets the information. Around 15 per cent of those people also use radio for this purpose most of them are so called `drivers`. A very little amount of the society uses printed press, the total number of the copies daily do not exceed 20-25 thousand.<sup>46</sup>

Second, lack of profiled media. The distinction between serious and `yellow` media has not institutionalized. In the same magazine one sees analytical articles as well as `yellow pages`. Most of the printed press is oppositional and `yellow`. There is only one newspaper 24 hours, maintaining the `whiteness` but only 5 per cent reads it which means that people got used to fake

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<sup>45</sup> Kintsurashvili, Tamar, Council of Mediaprogress, *Liberty*#6 (42) (2005)

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Levan Gakheladze, deputy of board of trustees of the public broadcaster

scandals. This problem can be addressed to radios and of course televisions. It is very often that journalists reported unchecked information and gossips.

Third, the radicalization of the media. The more oppositional the television is more unbiased and objective it is perceived. This tendency has lead many channels towards becoming aggressive and even violative. There could be made an analogy between oppositional and `yellow` media, but there are two pro governmental `yellow` televisions as well.

Forth, lack of professionalism. Televisions are hardly spending money on training journalists when this is the field they are the weakest at. Daily news which consists of maximum 10 stories lasts for longer than an hour. It takes journalists to tell one story 4-5 minutes. Every three story is accompanied with around 7 minute long commercials. Journalists in most cases are lazy to investigate and sometimes leave the audience uninformed about important events.

Fifth, politicization of televisions. In most cases it is news for which people watch televisions. Daily political news on every channel is shown 5 times a day. Every channel has at least one political talk-show everyday which lasts two hours. So there stays a little time for channels to be caring about children, teenagers and intellectuals, providing them with cultural-educative or scientific programs/investigations.

Analyzing all these problems creates a severe need and importance of profiled, professional and valuable televisions caring about public interest and taste. I think that there is a hope since there has been established Media Council focused on increasing the degree of professionalism in the Georgian media as well as worrying about independence of the media and objectiveness and correctness of the information. And also there has been established Public Broadcaster caring about the part of the society who is not satisfied with the offers of commercial televisions and expects cultural, cognitive and relaxing programs.

### 2.2.1 Georgian Media Council

In 2005 as the media landscape was analyzed an importance of a new institution as media council was seen. It was funded by the Open Society Georgian Foundation and took several months to be established. It was modeled on the European experience for media self regulation.

Major part of the members of the council are society representatives and minor part include media, several leading televisions, one magazine and regional media association. The function of the council is to protect media ethics.

There was a big controversy over this new institution as the essence of the professional self-regulation was less comprehensive for the media itself.<sup>47</sup> This union of non governmental organizations and media representatives was understood as a censorship on the editorial independence of journalists and a control of the freedom of televisions.

It is obvious that media council is not only for discussing complains against media. It is a democratic institution protecting media from any political intervention. Self-regulation which aims at increasing the degree of journalistic production limits the intervention of anyone in the media activities. Another reason why journalists and television owners do not see the importance of the media council is that media still has not realized its accountability for the society. In the Georgian case media is responsible for those who give it subsidies. The only sector in whose interest is the increase of the journalistic production is civil society who knows the role and effectiveness of professional media in the democratization process of the society. The establishment of journalistic standards and self-regulation principles is the act of showing respect and accountability to the society.

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<sup>47</sup> Kintsurashvili, Tamar, Council of Mediaprogress, *Liberty*#6 (42) (2005)

Prior to the presidential elections the Media Council has published the memorandum that the member media representatives complied with. The objective of the memorandum was that media reported an unbiased and fair coverage of the immediate political events of the presidential elections and post-election period. It restricted journalists reporting 'unchecked, unfounded accusations, facts gossips' replication, especially in those cases, when information of that kind can provoke violence, mass disorder...' (Article 4) 'When organizing discussion programs (talk shows) media outlets should ensure balanced selection of the audience.' (Article 9) 'Coverage of public opinion polls, including exit polls should be made by media outlets only in case, if they are conducted in accordance with international standards and scientifically reliable methods ... and with naming the source of financing and ordering.' (Article 11)

Above I named those directives which had never been followed by journalists, especially in the pre election period. I think that complying with this memorandum will be a big step forward in developing unbiased and reliable televisions.

The reason I have provided an overview of Georgian recent political and media situation is that knowing this reader will easily orientate in understanding the circumstances under which public broadcaster has established. Public broadcaster as well as other social or political institution is not an 'island unto itself, but embedded in social and ecological networks'<sup>48</sup> thus in the process of researching the transformation of state TV into public TV socio-political approach is much useful than media-centric approach.

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<sup>48</sup> Jakubowicz, Karol and Sukosd Miklos (ed), Twelve Concepts Regarding Media System Evolution and Democratization in Post-Communist Societies, *Finding the Right Place on the Map: Central and Eastern European Media Change in a Global Perspective*. (Bristol, London: Intellect Books, 2008) (Forthcoming): 26

## **Chapter 3 – Exploring the Degree of Change: From State Television to Public Broadcaster**

In the sections below I intend to measure the degree of the transformation of the television from being state owned to publicly accountable. The goals of this part is on the one hand to show the reader how close Georgian public broadcaster is to the idea of the public service broadcasting established in Western Europe and on the other hand to show the need and effectiveness of the institution in Georgian media.

### ***3.1 Legal Definition***

Creation of the Georgian Public Broadcasting is connected to the Law on Broadcasting, adopted by the Georgian Parliament on December 23, 2004, and enacted on January 18, 2005. The transformation of state television into public broadcasting and an introduction of a new management style were concurrent to adoption of the new law.

The Georgian Public Broadcasting complies with acting Georgian legislation and operates as a governmental legal entity that is publicly owned and financed. Its purpose is to provide accurate and up-to-date information that is free from political and commercial bias and is shared without any hidden agendas. The programming seeks to address the needs and interests of the larger Georgian society through diversity of programs and viewpoints. The intelliential product is intended for Television-Radio Broadcasting on non-commercial airwaves. This legal entity operates independently from governmental direction and control. It is publicly accountable under collective ownership and operates freely from any state structure or institution. (Georgia's Law on Broadcasting, Article 15)



For establishing an independent and democratic institution it is not sufficient to define in on the paper but to create a form and structure which will protect it from any intervention. The law on broadcasting contributed in creating public broadcaster and set rules important in terms of freedom of speech, access of information and independence of media institutions.

### **3.2 Appointing Management**

The public broadcaster is ruled by the two bodies:

1. The board of trustees;
2. The general director.

The board consists of 9 members who are elected for 9 years but 1/3 of it is changed once in 2 years. The member of the board cannot be elected more than 2 times.

Members are selected through a public competition. The candidate:

1. Must be known and trusted by the society;
  2. Must have a high education;
  3. Must have 5-year work experience.
- 
- Candidates have to register within 30 days after the declaration of the competition.
  - After the registry the president of Georgia looks at the list of participants and names at least 3 candidates on 1 vacant place.
  - Then the parliament has to elect candidates within 30 days.
  - The candidate is elected if (s)he receives more votes compared to other candidates, but has to receive votes from the half of the members of the parliament.
  - If the parliament dislikes and does not elect the nominees then the president has to offer it a different list.

The president of Georgia can immediately dissolve the Board member if the judiciary discusses any of member's wrongdoing giving a sanction of at least limiting his/her freedom. 1/3 of the members of the parliament can decide about the dissolution of the board member if they find him guilty in wrongdoing.<sup>49</sup>

The Board has:

1. The head
2. And the deputy.

Board members elect them on their first meeting; those two members who receive the majority of the votes take the posts.

The Board elects the head of the broadcaster for 6 years through a public competition. The Board can elect the director for the second time without the competition. Only the board can dissolve the director if 2/3 of its members declare distrust towards him/her so.

The procedure of (s)electing the head of the broadcaster was following:

- On March 24 and 26, 2008 the board of trustees discussed the applications and has set the date of the secret-voting of the first tour;
- All members receiving more than 5 votes of the board members would enter the second tour;
- 8 candidates passed the first tour;
- They had interviews with board members about their future perspectives and tasks of public broadcaster;

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<sup>49</sup> See Georgian law on Broadcasting, Article 27

- In the second tour of secret-voting the winning candidate received 5 votes and the other 4; other six members received no votes.

The state television was working under a very simple structure and appointment rule. The president could directly appoint and dissolve (without much justification) the head of the television. Everything was decided in the government for the television what to broadcast and what not, given the television no editorial independence. I think that changing the rule of management appointment is the field which transformed the television all together and established a completely new institution instead.

### **3.3 Funding**

The budget of the public broadcaster consists of the money which it receives automatically from the `state budget` and the money, legally determined, that it can earn. Public broadcaster can earn commercials anytime but not at the prime time – from 19:00 to 24:00. This rule protects the broadcaster from severe forms of commercialization but leaves it some room for earning limited amount of advertisement. There was a time in the history of state television when it received money from the state budget as well as half of the money circulating in the media market. At the very time Rustavi 2 received the other half of that money.

The money it receives from the state budget is people's money in a sense that it consists of taxes taken from those people who receive certain amount of money in Georgia. The article in the law on broadcasting concerning the funding of public broadcaster has been amended this year, 2008 in a way that broadcaster will receive money directly from the state budget; the amount of money is not yet determined. Prior to this change the broadcaster received 0.15 percent of annual GDP which of course insured the process to be automatic and less dependent

on the state. But the problems occurred at this time too; amount of money for the broadcaster was usually calculated from the earlier GDPs which were much lower than later ones.

With this amendment in the law public broadcaster became obliged to spend 25 percent of its budget on a) reporting and covering cases about South Ossetia and Abkhazia and b) broadcasting in minority languages. Other information about the funding principles and the obligations of the broadcaster is not yet declared.

### **3.4 Mission**

The Public Broadcasting guides its activities on the basis of program priorities outlined by the Board of Trustees. The mission is to reinforce democratic values, raise the level of public education, and encourage diversity and social integration as well as to uphold historical heritage and cultural traditions. Clearly defined operational Goals and Values assist the Public Broadcasting in timely and quality sharing of information in various forms, which include news analysis, the airing of documentaries, educational service programming and sporting events. These programs offer a range of alternative choices by the Public Broadcasting for its diverse pool of TV viewers and radio listeners.<sup>50</sup>

The goals of Georgian public broadcasting are:

- Creating high quality free television;
- Popularizing Georgian cultural heritage;
- Creating educational programming;

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<sup>50</sup> The information accessed at [http://www.gpb.ge/about\\_1.php?lang=eng&lm\\_id=1&sub\\_id=2](http://www.gpb.ge/about_1.php?lang=eng&lm_id=1&sub_id=2) on May 20

- Informing the society adequately in terms of ongoing political, social and cultural processes;
- Promoting civic and democratic values;
- Promoting tolerance towards diversity of opinions.

The public broadcaster has 8 Public Boards responsive to public needs and interests. Public boards provide the broadcaster with recommendation and feedback so that the broadcaster considered when airing various programs.

At this stage public broadcasting has following program trends:

- Information-analytical – news and political talk-shows;
- Cognitive – scientific and highly educational talk-shows;
- Investigations – journalist investigations;
- Youth entertaining – youth talk-shows about their interests and problems;
- Children entertaining – children musical competitions and fairy-tales telling;
- Sports – live broadcastings and documentaries;
- Musical-entertaining – morning shows, cooking, movies and music.

Public broadcaster is the only television in Georgia having daily news in minority languages. It also plans to have two more channels added where it will have a) movies and b) documentary films (discovery, national geography, etc.) in minority languages. Having programs in minority languages is an important part of integrating people leaving in Georgian territories. They will be given a chance to hear Georgian and read in their languages so that this way they could learn basics of Georgian.

Major problem for the broadcaster in implementing its mission is a dilemma of form and content. Most of its programs are very interesting and educative, but static and boring. Public broadcaster lacks human resources caring about the design of programming. It also lacks professional journalists and hosts of TV shows. Lately the broadcaster started inviting famous intellectuals hosting analytical political and educative programs. The project is successful, but in this case programs lack to be dynamic and viewable.

### ***3.5 Preventing Intervention***

Independence, this is where the public broadcaster is doing its hard to overcome the stereotype of being the state television. For this end it initiated a memorandum<sup>51</sup> on its impartial electoral campaign of all contestants which the broadcaster wants to become the standard of reporting news and political talk shows. The memorandum made the broadcaster take important responsibilities:

- To start daily news with electoral campaign;
- To cover the party activities of all participants equally;
- To host political discussions so that parties had an opportunity to talk to the voters and debate with their rivals.

The broadcaster invited any political or social group as well as OSCE and other international organizations to participate in monitoring it in implementing these rules.

The broadcaster on the other hand made political parties take responsibilities in the political game so that parties would:

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<sup>51</sup> Memorandum on parliamentary elections, Public Broadcaster, May, 2008

- Cooperate with the broadcaster and inform it about their political activities 1 week earlier, otherwise the broadcaster was not responsible of covering them;
- Follow the norms of ethics when participating in the broadcaster's programs;
- Contacts them in a written form within 2 days of having any complain against the broadcaster and not offend the television and its stuff publicly.

The memorandum included some other important rules as well and it was signed by all parties participating in elections.

The reports of international organizations such as OSCE and PACE were written in favor of the public broadcaster and its impartiality. `Public TV... offered the electorate a valuable opportunity to compare parties and candidates through talk shows, free-of-charge presentations, news reporting of the campaign and televised debates... During the media monitoring of the last six weeks of the election campaign, public TV devoted similar proportions of its political and election prime-time news coverage to the United Opposition (18 per cent) and the UNM [United National Movement, a governmental party] (17 percent).`<sup>52</sup>

The amended electoral law differentiates between qualified and unqualified candidates of the election in terms of televisions offering them free airtime for electoral advertisements. Qualified candidate/party is the one who won at least 4% of the vote in the last parliamentary elections and at least 3% of the vote in the last local elections. The public broadcaster offered both qualified and unqualified candidates free-of-charge electoral campaigning; advertisements

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<sup>52</sup> OSCE report on the parliamentary elections in Georgia in May 21, 2008, accessed at [http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2008/05/31268\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2008/05/31268_en.pdf) on May 24, 2008

as well as live campaigning. According to the PACE report `the public broadcaster was more balanced [compare to other commercial televisions] in its coverage`. <sup>53</sup>

The category `more balanced` obviously does not mean that everything is going well on the public broadcaster, but it means that there is a big step forward in terms of channel self-realization as an independent and not state institution.

To go back with the presidential elections which was held in January 5, 2008 there also media monitoring programs report that `the news on public TV was somewhat more balanced in the time allocated to all candidates...`. <sup>54</sup>

Georgian Media Council reported time spent on candidate campaigning through televisions in the pre-presidential elections period. The results for the public broadcaster are following:

Table 1<sup>55</sup>

Name	Status	Hours	Minutes	Seconds
Gachechiladze Levan	opposition	3	18	5
Patarkatsishvili Badri	opposition	3	12	42
Gamkrelidze Davit	opposition	3	37	46
Natelashvili Shalva	opposition	3	51	31
Saakashvili Mikheil	Former president	2	51	31
Maisashvili Ghia	opposition	2	48	6
Sarishvili Irina	opposition	1	49	20

<sup>53</sup> PACE, Doc. 11496, 21 January 2008, *Observation of the extraordinary presidential elections in Georgia* (5 January 2008), Report

<sup>54</sup> OSCE report on presidential elections in January 5, 2008.

<sup>55</sup> Georgian Media Council report on presidential elections in January 5, 2008



For a comparative overview here I will show how much time Rustavi 2 gave to presidential candidates.

Table 2<sup>56</sup>

Name	Status	Hours	Minutes	Seconds
Gachechiladze Levan	opposition	7	20	50
Patarkatsishvili Badri	opposition	4	04	26
Gamkrelidze Davit	opposition	5	58	42
Natelashvili Shalva	opposition	6	34	37
Saakashvili Mikheil	Former president	10	17	38
Maisashvili Ghia	opposition	5	02	13
Sarishvili Irina	opposition	3	00	56

Tables show how public broadcaster gave equal time to the elections candidates and unbalanced division of time that Rustavi 2 offered to the candidates.

The presidential elections January, 2008 resulted in a following way:

Table 3<sup>57</sup>

Candidates	%
Saakashvili Mikheil	53.47
Gachechiladze Levan	25.69
Patarkatsishvili Badri	7.10
Natelashvili Shalva	6.49
Gamkrelidze Davit	4.02
Maisashvili Ghia	0.77
Sarishvili Irina	0.16

There were some setbacks in the public broadcaster both in the pre-presidential and pre-parliamentary election periods. The broadcaster's journalists were revealed to have covered

<sup>56</sup> Georgian Media Council report on presidential elections in January 5, 2008

<sup>57</sup> Georgian presidential elections, 2008 accessed at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgian\\_presidential\\_election,\\_2008](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgian_presidential_election,_2008) on May 27

political campaigning with the tone of favoring the president (in the presidential elections period) and the ruling party (in the parliamentary elections period).

I deem that it would be even surprising that public broadcaster was doing fine in this field, without any setbacks. The information center in the public broadcaster was the sector which needed considerable changes. It was unprofessional (this is a big challenge even today) and most corrupted. Time by time journalists will recover from the self-censorship.

### 3.6 Public Trust/Audience

Compared to 2006 survey the ratings of public broadcaster have increased in terms of public trust and audience share. Unfortunately since then a comprehensive research has not been conducted, but I base my conclusion on the interactive questions held on public broadcaster.

According to 2006 results, on the question, how often people watch certain television:

Table 4<sup>58</sup>

Televisions	Often %	Sometimes %	Rarely %	Do not watch %	Do not receive %
Public Broadcaster	13,7	15,5	36,5	21,5	12,8
Rustavi2	62,8	16,6	9,6	4,6	6,4
TV Imedi	77,2	8,3	4,5	3,5	6,5

For comparison here I have chosen two other leading televisions, which have a relatively high audience share and for me it is not surprising because these televisions had years for inviting views and introducing their journalists who eventually became publicly trusted.

Table 5<sup>59</sup>

Channels	Audience Share %	Trusted %
Imedi TV	87.0	80.7

<sup>58</sup> Attitudes and Expectations towards Public Broadcaster, research conducted by the initiative group of public broadcaster and the Institute of Social Research, October, 2006

<sup>59</sup> Georgian Public Opinion Barometer 2006, Institute for Policy Studies, accessed at [www.ips.ge](http://www.ips.ge) on May 25

Rustavi 2	76.9	59.9
Public Broadcaster	32.5	21.9

This research includes 2 above discussed televisions, 3 other Georgian commercial channels, Russian channels, Euro News/BBC/CNN, Armenian TV, Azeri TV, and Turkish TV.

It is noteworthy that in both researches public broadcaster is on the third place with its ratings which means that it successfully competes with other commercial televisions and has found its niche in Georgian media. The other two televisions had years for inviting audience and introducing and making their journalists publicly trusted figures.

In general, the low audience share/trust is determined by several factors as: a) stereotype about the broadcaster to be state owned; b) relatively low coverage area of the broadcaster compared to other televisions; c) lack of funds, while other televisions afford annual re-equipment public broadcaster still works with 30-40 year-old equipment. The effectiveness of the television in most parts is determined with its visuality, thus public broadcaster offers far less quality in this regard than the other two channels leading ratings. People will always prefer watching the television which offers better visual quality.

Another reason of low audience share/trust is a misunderstanding of the conception and need of public broadcasting. According to the 2006 survey on people's expectations towards public broadcaster, 65 percent of the interviewees know about state TV transiting into public TV. The attitude of 48.4 percent of the interviewees towards the reforms held in public broadcasting is positive, while 20.4 percent estimates them 'more positively than negatively'. Nevertheless major part of the interviewees does not comprehend the conception of public service broadcasting. On the question 'what do you think the public broadcaster should be oriented on?' They reply in a following way:

Table 6<sup>60</sup>

Protecting and supporting the traditional Georgian cultural values	57,2 %
Establishing and popularizing the democratic and civic values in the society	17,7 %
Popularizing the solidarity towards multi-social values	8,3 %
Informing the society. Television should not be participating in forming social values and opinions	16,1 %

It can be argued that it is impossible to receive information about the social opinion and understanding of public service broadcasting, suppose choosing between two answers one may go with the first just because the second option is not comprehensive for him. But I think that such questions show the major tendency on which one can speculate. I am sure that the disproportion between social expectations and the public broadcaster's priorities is one of the major factors which determine the low degree of social trust toward the channel.

Monitoring group of the public broadcaster has a new project on introducing the idea and principles of public broadcasting to the society. It is planned that the project will become a live TV program with interactive questions to the society so that the latter had an opportunity of participating in the discussions.

In the parliamentary elections period, May, 2008 public broadcaster was hosting a live show `Monitori` every Saturday evening, discussing how objectively the television is covering the pre-election campaign. Discussions were held between elections candidates, press speakers and public representatives. There was an interactive question in the show, asking people how objective public broadcasting was in covering pre-election campaign. In the first half of the month around 46 percent of the society was answering the question negatively, while in the second half of the month the balance has changed in favor of public broadcaster's objectiveness, approximately 55 percent conceived was answering the question positively.

<sup>60</sup> Attitudes and Expectations towards Public Broadcaster, research conducted by the initiative group of public broadcaster and the Institute of Social Research, October, 2006

According to the 6 criteria discussed above the television has transformed from state to public broadcaster. Yet it is hard to define the process as successful or not since it is still underway. But it is noteworthy that the broadcaster is on the right path of becoming truly public television, serving for the interests and need of whole society. Problems occurring in certain sectors can be overcome if there is a will and determination. Based on my research I see several people seriously working on the television to become publicly accountable, independent, informative and educational. The process is underway and further research is needed for making further conclusions.

## Conclusion

The media has to perform several specific roles in the post-communist media systems, as indeed in any young democracy which includes:

- Introduction and legitimization of the concepts of democracy, rule of law and constitutionalism
- Introduction and legitimization of the concepts of political pluralism, competition; and new political parties and candidates as legitimate competitors
- Developing civil society by introducing NGOs and other civic groups as legitimate public actors
- Democratic agenda setting and framing of current issues along the concepts above
- Challenging the space and degree of transformation for further democratization
- Safeguarding new democratic institutions
- Exploring wrongdoing by old as well as new elites (e.g., investigative journalism) and give space to socio-political scandals to define boundaries of acceptable conduct
- Develop accountability to citizens/viewers
- Personalization of politics: introducing candidates and parties before the first democratic elections by applying criteria regarding democratic programs and personal skills
- Democratic education regarding elections and voting procedures
- Offer a space for democratic evaluation of national past (including the communist period and its leaders) and the discussion of historical justice
- Contribution to national integration along democratic lines (in many newly formed countries, contribution to nation building)

- Democratic performance of the media as a contribution to the democratization of other sectors (media communication as a facilitator).<sup>61</sup>

It is democratic performance of the media which has a huge impact on establishing democratic institutions and developing the conception of democratic citizenship. Thus, the process of media democratization is essential and has a `spillover` effect in terms of democratizing other political or societal institutions/sectors.

For pursuing the ends stated above media has to be featured as professional. Journalists as well as the television management should be working on self development and developing of the channel. In most cases commercial televisions are described to be professional. They are creative and dynamic for earning more and more advertisements. They have enough funds for a continuous technical equipment of the televisions as well as training their journalists so that the television was competitive and successful. But in the process of implementing this ambitious plan they are accused of being less and less devotional to the democratic values. Thus, there is a conceptual need of public broadcasting which cares much less about commercials and is oriented on creating diverse and valuable programs for enabling the effective working of a pluralistic democracy. Though it is less competitive in the media market it satisfies not only the needs of the management but the expectations of the public including different social groups.

*Has Georgian state television transformed into a true public service broadcasting?*

I can answer this question in a following way. To my mind the most important part in this process of transformation is measuring successes and failures of the public broadcasting,

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<sup>61</sup> Karol Jakubowicz and Miklós Sükösd (ed) *Finding the Right Place on the Map: Central and Eastern European Media Change in a Global Perspective*. Bristol, London: Intellect Books, 2007 (forthcoming) pg. 3

analyzing problems it is facing and prospects it is having. And in this framework of analysis one should define the need and effectiveness of the broadcasting. I see the significance and positive perspectives of Georgian public broadcaster and below I will explain how.

After exploring the main characteristics of Georgian media, featured with the lack of professionalism and profile both by televisions and printed press Georgian public broadcaster seems to be having farther perspectives as it gives spectrum of choice to the audience. By overcoming certain difficulties it can even become a leading television.

I do not think that at this stage, when public broadcasting has recently established and has already determined its mission and profile, one should analyze whether the institution is fully independent, has an ideal way of funding and has the highest ratings. It should not be compared to the western public broadcasting, in terms of satisfying strict standards and commitments. It should be evaluated based on its path; success and failure. For me the success is that broadcaster today is the most balanced television, receives money not directly from the government but from the state budget from people's money and also it is third on television ratings with its increasing audience share/trust.

There are general problems hindering the successful development of public service broadcasting as:

- Lack of experience of building public broadcaster;
- Lack of stabile funds;
- Lack of human resources;
- Weakness of civil society.

And there are concrete problems asking for an immediate solution:



- Ineffective structure – there is no precise division of duties and responsibilities among staff members at all levels;
- Lack of discipline and sense of duty as well as lack of corporate unity and team spirit;
- Management problems of the different branches of the news service;
- News production standards and format not defined – decisions are made personally by the executives on a daily basis;
- News service permanently faces communications problems such as telephone communication or transportation.

Other than these `journalists (Television-18; Radio-13) lack inventiveness and creativity; they often fail to get across the core and essence of the story; they are hardly find materials from their own sources. In most cases journalists do not come up with ideas for stories of their own and wait for the producer to find a story for them. They seldom meet the deadlines set. Reporters usually forget such basics of journalism as "what, when, where and how", most of them are tied-tongued and lack reporting skills. Live interviews turn into boring repetitive monologues, uninterrupted by interviewers. <sup>62</sup>

But this picture is not the only problem of a public broadcaster, but a main feature of televisions as well as printed press. All these problems should not be surprising after years of Soviet rule. It can be argued that they are `teething` problems as the institution has recently established and has been transplanted not evolved naturally. I think that most importantly the institution has established and luckily it is under a little political pressure which can be overcome

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<sup>62</sup> interview with the former head of public broadcaster, Tamar Kintsurashvili

with a determination for the public broadcaster values by the management and by the staff. There were two steps made towards this end by Georgian public broadcaster one on presidential and the other on parliamentary elections. Public broadcaster was evaluated as the most 'balanced' and 'objective' television in Georgian media. While most of other televisions invited criticism of the politicians, society and local/international observers as they have experienced serious political intervention from either government or the opposition.

Public broadcaster has an essential mission to be serving for the society. It may have certain setbacks in terms of following the general commitments that true public broadcasters should face. But I am optimistic about the perspectives of this institution at least based on the Georgian case. Channel that is oriented on offering a diverse choice to the society, creating entertaining, cultural, cognitive, educative and relaxing programs, is needed and will be needed. As I am concluding based on the Georgian experience public broadcaster stays the only channel implementing this mission. Other than that it has become the most balanced and neutral television as evaluated by local and international organizations. Georgian public broadcaster is proudly contributing to the acceleration of post-communist transformation and media democratization.

## **Appendix: List of Interviewees**

Gakheladze, Levan - the deputy of the board of trustees of public broadcaster;

Kintsurashvili, Tamar - the former director of the public broadcaster;

Koplatadze, Badri – a professor of journalistic school GIPA;

Mskhiladze, Ketevan - the head of monitoring team of the public broadcaster;

Ramishvili, Levan - the chairman of Liberty institute;

Tevzadze, Gigi - the rector of I. Chavchavadze state university.

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