



***This Affects You Too* campaign challenges the decision to seize satellite dishes belonging to Maestro TV Company**

On 11 July, the court granted the request of the Prosecutor General's Office to seize satellite antennas belonging to Maestro TV Company.

According to the statement released by the Prosecutor General's Office, in the frames of the investigation into voter-bribing through free of charge distribution of satellite antennas, launched on 20 June 2012, it has been established that Maestro Ltd imported to Georgia a large number of satellite antennas upon instructions of *Elita Burji* executives, a company affiliated with the political organization *Georgian Dream* .

The Prosecutor General's Office claims that it has sufficient evidence indicating that the above antennas will again be distributed among population free of charge under the same scheme as has lately been employed by *Global Contract Consulting*.

In this regard, we believe that:

1. In contrast to the case with *Elita Burji* in the present case the National Audit Service has not adopted a decision on Maestro Ltd being affiliated with any political party or on finding the company in violation of the law and has not addressed the Prosecutor General's Office with a request to examine the above issue. Furthermore, neither the Prosecutor's Office nor the Court has produced any evidence whatsoever to the general public proving that purchasing the satellite antennas by Maestro Ltd, as well as their installation, is in any way related to the activities of a certain party.
2. We learned from the announcement circulated by the TV company management and its owner that the above antennas had been purchased by Maka Asatiani, one of the company's owners, who does not have express campaigning goals and has not been found by the Audit Service as affiliated with any political party. Subsequently, restrictions established by paragraphs 1 and 2 of the Article 25² of the Georgian organic law on Political Unions of Citizens cannot be applied to her case.
3. Under Article 164^{1 e} of the Georgian Criminal Code, bribing voters implies " direct or indirect offer, promise, transfer or provision of money, securities (including financial instrument), other property, property rights, services or other inducement as well as accepting such inducement knowingly, or entering phantom, hypocritical or other bargains with the view to avoid restrictions imposed by the law" The Prosecutor General's Office has

not produced evidence proving that Maestro Ltd has transferred any antennas to anyone for election purposes or any of its representatives making a statement confirming such a purpose.

We, therefore, declare that seizing Maestro antennas was in violation of the norms of the Georgian legislation. Such acts hinder the development of independent TV companies and constitute a blatant interference of the state with the media business. By doing so, the authorities put obstacles to the creation of a pluralist media environment, which significantly deteriorate the overall election environment creating unequal conditions for competition.

We make an appeal to the Georgian Government once again, urging it to take every possible measure in order to ensure that citizens have access to diverse sources of information. At the same time, we call on the Georgian Government to produce pertinent and reliable evidence that justifies the seizing of the satellite dishes imported by Maestro Ltd.

We also appeal to the international organizations, the diplomatic corps accredited in Georgia, and the observer organizations to react appropriately to the cases of restriction and impediment of the work of the independent media in the pre-election period.