



## TI Georgia Calls on Government to Ensure Diverse Media Market

TBILISI - 7 April, 2011 – Transparency International (TI) Georgia is calling on the Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC), the regulatory body for electronic communication, to ensure that approvals in the next round of broadcasting licenses include channels dedicated to serious news and educational programming.

TI Georgia is concerned that the findings of an opinion poll commissioned by the GNCC will be used to justify the denial to issue broadcast licenses to applicants who want to air news and current affairs programs, political debates, investigative reporting, documentaries or other informative and educational content. The Board of the GNCC should take into account the reality of the Georgian TV market, which offers many different entertainment programs but little journalistic competition and current affairs reporting outside the capital, when defining the regulator's licensing priorities for the coming years.

A free and vibrant media environment is essential for Georgia's democracy. Given the wide reach of television in the country, the GNCC plays a key role in promoting access to a plurality of views and opinions over the airwaves, while also ensuring license holders' full compliance with the law.

Results of the poll, conducted by the national polling company BCG Research, and shared with the media on 5 April indicate that Georgians prefer to watch music and entertainment rather than news and analytical programs. However, an independent media survey funded by the European Union and carried out by the Caucasus Research Resource Center in 2009 suggests that many Georgians would in fact like to see more and better quality current affairs programs.

The Law on Broadcasting requires the GNCC to conduct a bi-annual opinion poll. The regulator should define programmatic priorities for license seekers on the basis of this poll *and* a number of other actions, including public consultation. In recent years the GNCC rejected applicants for licenses, arguing that the required survey had not been conducted since 2004.

While a simple survey question may ask consumers about their preferences on news versus entertainment, a survey could also delve deeper into important issues on the way Georgians want to consume news-related media. Until the exact methodology and raw data of this particular survey are made public, there is no way to know what questions were asked or, importantly, not asked, and how the results can be interpreted.

GNCC should ensure that their decisions interfere as little as possible into editorial independence of broadcast media and act as safeguards of the general policy framework allowing for pluralism and independence. Specifically:

- We ask the GNCC to make the detailed findings of the survey, including its methodology and raw data, publicly available on its website.
- The GNCC should allow for meaningful public consultations on the upcoming definition of programmatic priorities.
- In the interest of the government's obligation to support civic education, the GNCC should prioritize licenses to applicants offering attractive educational and informative programming, rather than entertainment-only shows.

The GNCC is in charge of regulating electronic communication in Georgia - radio, television, Internet and telecommunication. The GNCC can issue private and community broadcasting licenses for general



(including news and current affairs) and specialized programming, providing the regulator with significant powers to determine and limit the type of content can be aired by a broadcaster. Licenses are issued on a 10-year term. The regulator's board consists of five Commissioners who are pre-selected by the Georgian President and approved by Parliament. The President also appoints one Commissioner to head the GNCC.

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