

Georgian Media Environment from 2012 Parliamentary Elections till Present

Since 2012, the Georgian media has experienced significant changes to become much more pluralistic, as confirmed by respective international ratings. In summer 2015, Georgia fully switched to [digital broadcasting](#), which definitely should be regarded as a positive development for the Georgian media environment. Furthermore, several new TV stations were launched and some old ones resumed broadcasting. New TV “Pirveli” emerged in the Georgian television space, TV Company “Iberia” resumed its broadcasting as well.

Over the last four years, position of Georgia in the media independence ratings has significantly improved. From 2012 onwards, Georgia has moved a few points ahead in the ranking of the international organization – “Reporters without Borders”. The given progress can be explained on the one hand by certain improvements in the Georgian media landscape and successful transition to digital broadcasting and on the other, by aggravated situation with regard to human rights and democracy in a number of countries worldwide.

Substantial changes occurred not only with respect to media outlets, their owners and leading journalists, but in the [advertising market](#) as well. For the first time over the recent years, advertising revenues started to experience substantial shrinkage in 2015. Compared to the previous year, 2016 advertising income dropped by 33%, as declared by TV stations. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that present advertising market is not as much monopolized as it used to be before 2012. There is no gross interference with the advertising market on the part of the State as well.

Developments unfolded in the television space deserve particular attention. After 2012, changes affected only [owners of TV stations](#), but program hosts, leading journalists and editorial teams as well. In the course of 4 years, a number of highly rated programs were gradually shut down; according to hosts of the given programs, deals between the Government and the media owners were behind such turn of events. In some cases, policy of the media outlet owner was claimed to be an underlying reason. During the reporting period, certain cases of blackmailing and exerting pressure on journalists were reported; for the most part, no effective investigation has been launched with respect to such facts.

It was also revealed that the country is still facing challenges in the field of the journalists’ labor rights. It holds particularly true for private TV companies, where conclusion of long-term employment contracts with journalists remains a problematic issue.

For assessing the Georgian media environment [“dispute over ownership of “Rustavi 2”](#), now being considered by the Supreme Court, is a focal point. Consideration of the case by the City and Appeal Courts and developments unfolded around its management have raised a number of questions at the [local](#), as well as [international](#) level concerning political implications behind the process.

During the reporting period, much [activism](#) was observed on the part of anti-Western media outlets. In certain cases, they received certain funding from the budgetary organizations.

The regional media faced significant challenges. Even though the regional media outlets have become much more active, their heavy [reliance](#) on funds from the local government posed a significant problem.

International ratings

Over the last four years, Georgia has moved a few points ahead in the rating of the international organization “Reporters without Borders”. However, statement released by the organization highlights potential threats jeopardizing the media environment - “the media continue to be highly polarized and, despite some progress, media owners often call the shots on editorial content. And the war for ownership of the main TV channels is a source of concern about the future of pluralism” – that’s the way the organization [“Reporters without Borders”](#) assesses the Georgian media space in 2016.

RSF - schedule of ratings 2012-2016

According to [IREX](#) media sustainability index, from 2011 through 2014 rating of Georgia showed a positive upward trend in all four components of the study: freedom of speech, professional journalism, plurality of news sources and business management. However, as the study showed, unfavorable events occurred in 2015 and 2016. Index of “business management” deteriorated sharply and as a result the Georgian media fell into the unsustainable/mixed category.

Media Sustainability Index

“Decline of the score in the given objective explicitly indicates that the panel members do not view the media to be operating as an efficient and self-sustaining enterprise. The given viewpoint is probably caused by the weakening of the advertising market, along with the economic crisis that shook the country in 2015”.

By the assessment [“Freedom House”](#), rating of the media freedom remains unchanged for the last three years. On a seven-point scale with 7 standing for non-free media and 1-for free, Georgia is awarded 4.00 scores. In its annual report on transition-economy countries, the organization gives a rather harsh assessment to the Georgian media landscape 2016:

“There are signs of stagnation and even possible regression in certain areas, and particularly in the realm of media freedom. While the Georgian media landscape remains diverse and largely pluralistic, the investigation and prosecution of the leading opposition media outlet, Rustavi2,

points to political pressure by the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) coalition.” – Freedom House, 2016

Ownership of TV Companies and Staff Changes

Rustavi 2

04.12.2012 – 40% of “Rustavi” shares were [sold](#) to [David Kezerashvili's](#) company “Media Georgia” for \$ 500,000. “Media Georgia”, which [was registered in the Public Registry](#) just one day prior to concluding the above-mentioned deal, in its turn [resold](#) the shares to Giorgi Karamanashvili for the same price five days later. From November 2012, Rustavi 2 is owned by Karamanashvili brothers, while 9% belonged to the late Giorgi Gegeshidze; after his decease, the shares were transferred to the ownership of his spouse, Nino Nizharadze. Right in November, the former member of the Government Nika Gvaramia became Director of Rustavi 2.

05.10.2012 – Founders of Rustavi 2 David Dvali and Jarji Akimidze released a statement announcing their intention [to start](#) a legal fight to get Rustavi 2 back.

22.12.12 – Nika Gvaramia [was accused](#) of assistance in bribery, money laundering, false entrepreneurship and document forgery; however, the court [acquitted](#) him a year later.

04.08.2015 – Kibar Khalvashi, a businessman and a former shareholder of Rustavi 2, started a legal fight to get back his shares in the TV Company. The businessman filed a suit to the court demanding restitution of his infringed property rights. Khalvashi [requested](#) the court to seize shares of Rustavi 2 until adoption of a final ruling.

01.09.2015 – In response to Kibar Khalvashi's request, the court imposed a lien on 100% shares of TV Company Georgia; the ban was explained by the attempt to sell shares of TV Company in Rustavi 2. Congruent to the agreement available in the Public Register, Dimitri Chikovani, brother-in-law of the former Defense Minister David Kezerashvil intended to buy TV Company Georgia.

5.11.2015 – by decision of the judge, powers of Director General Nika Gvaramia and Financial Director Kakha Damenia were suspended. Former Director of the TV Company “Imedi” Revaz Sakevarishvili and David Dvali [were appointed](#) as interim managers. In a few days, Sakevarishvili reinstated the Directors.

10.06.2016 - The Court of Appeal upheld [the decision](#) of the City Court on transfer of 60% of Rustavi 2 shares to Kibar Khalvashi and the remaining 40% - to the company owned by Khilvashi.

04.09.2016 – Information on the [deal](#) between Irakli Okruashvili and Kibar Khalvashi became publicly known; according to the deal, Khalvashi owned Rustavi 2 on behalf of Irakli Okruashvili. As Okruashvili claimed, he is going to fight for Rustavi 2 and apply to foreign courts.

On September 9, the Supreme Court accepted the appeal of Rustavi 2.

TV Company Georgia, shareholder of Rustavi 2 lodged a complaint with the Constitutional Court as well. So far, Constitutional Court has failed to collect sufficient number of judges and come up with a quorum to adopt a decision with respect to the [appeal](#). There is an impression that the case hearing gets deliberately hindered and delayed by the implicated political group.

Maestro

18.09.2015 – Director of “Studio Maestro” Eter Gadabadze applied to [Tbilisi](#) City Hall with a request to declare Maestro insolvent and launch bankruptcy proceedings against Maestro.

The court accepted the suit. Giorgi Gachechiladze, one of the owners of “Maestro” stated that the channel was deliberately driven to bankruptcy and it was due another owner Maka Asatiani, requiring repayment of the loans that the company had taken from her.

Launch of the bankruptcy proceedings was followed in a few months by a [change](#) in the ownership of Maestro.

02.02.2016 – according to ownership changes registered in the Public Registry, Giorgi Gachechiladze became the TV Company’s majority shareholder (55%). He bought shares from two co-owners: Giorgi Ebraelidze and Levan Chikvaidze, purchasing 15% from each.

The remaining 45% shares of “Maestro are distributed as follows: Mamuka Ghlonti (15%), Ekaterine Akobia (5%) and Maka Asatiani (25%). As Giorgi Gachechiladze’s lawyer Irakli Kordzakhia claimed, Giorgi Gachechiladze borrowed money from Irakli Rukhadze to purchase shares. Rukhadze, in his turn, is in charge of Badri Patarkatsishvili’s family business, including TV Company “Imedi”. Giorgi Gachechiladze also confirmed connection with the Patarkatsishvili family.

Following the changes, the Partners’ Assembly dismissed the Director General Eter (Baia) Gadabadze from office. Her position was handed over to Levan Gachechiladze, to be later [replaced](#) by Zurab Nakeuri.

The dispute over Maestro ownership implicated private interests of some parties. At this point, a bargain has been reached between the parties and the channel continues its broadcasting.

Imedi

17.10.2012 – A few weeks after the Parliamentary elections, Imedi TV was handed over to the [the family of Badri Patarkatsishvili](#). Dispute around the TV Company lasted for years; family of Patarkatsishvili was accusing the State of seizing the Company.

13.06.2016 – Irakli Rukhadze became Chair of “Imedi TV” Supervisory Board. As a result, Natela Sakhokia, mother of Irakli Rukhadze, [resigned](#) from membership of the Board of Trustees at the Public Broadcaster.

23.06.2016 – Head of the News Service Maia Tabagari was discharged from office to be replaced by the journalist Nana Lezhava. “Chronicle” reporters released [a statement](#) regarding the replacement. As they claimed, unjustified staff relocations in the run-up to elections put at doubt “reputation, reliability and freedom of speech of the channel and its staff.”

Closure of TV Programs and Editorial Changes

During the reporting period, [facts](#) of TV channels being quitted by leading journalists were frequently reported. In certain cases, journalists were citing incompatibility of their views with the editorial policy and intervention of the TV Company management as the main reasons. There were talks as well that decisions of the management at certain TV channels were driven by political motivations. As the journalists [alleged](#), in some cases “removal” of specific hosts from the air was a direct order of the Government.

Maestro

28.09.2014 – Vakho Sanaia [quitted](#) Maestro TV. As the Director of the company Baia Gadabadze claimed, disagreement was the main reason for Sanaia to leave the channel. He used to host the program “Nine”. In December 2014, Sanaia released a statement regarding his decision to leave Maestro. As he stated, at the meeting with the Director he was told that his programs could bring the channel into confrontation with the Government and thus pose problems. A few months earlier, the program of Sanaia was openly criticized by the Government. On May 20, the Government Press Office released a statement and declared reporting of Vakho Sanaia as being biased. The program covered the stories, containing criticism towards the Government activities.

28.10.2014 – Diana Trapaidze and Teona Gogelia, hosts of the program “Subjective Opinion” [quitted](#) Maestro. Diana Trapaidze made no statement to explain the reasons for leaving the channel. However, as the producer of the program Irakli Absandze stated, Trapaidze adopted the decision following a meeting with the actual manager of the channel Kote Gogelia.

22.12.2014 – head of the news service and part of journalists [quitted](#) “Maestro”. Following confrontation with Kote Gogelia, spouse of one of the owners Maka Asatiani and the fiduciary, the Deputy Director and host of program “Nine” Nino Zhizhilashvili left Maestro, to be followed by other journalists and producers of the channel. Following the given events, reorganization of

the station was announced. As Zhizhilashvili later clarified, Kote Gogelia told her that Maestro was to become ideologically-driven and “pro-Georgian” channel.

21.01.2016 – After 7 years of cooperation, Maestro broke off relationship with the investigation studio “Monitor”. According to “Monitor”, management of “Maestro” named launch of private investigation program as the reason for severing cooperation. However, so far no program of such nature has been aired on the channel.

31.05.2016 – Zurab Nakeuri, Executive Director of Maestro [dismissed](#) Giorgi Isakadze, host of several programs.

Director of the TV Company adopted the decision following the request to take the programs of Isakadze to the so-called outsourcing.

According to Isakadze, apart from the so-called outsourcing of his programs, revision of remuneration policy for the staff of his program was the ultimate reason for his dismissal.

Giorgi Isakadze was a project manager and host of the programs: “Business Morning”, “Business Contact” and “Analytics”.

02.06.2016 – Powers of “Business Contact” and “Business Morning” staff were suspended due to their participation in the program “Choice” on “Rustavi 2” station. On July 3, programs “Business Contact”, “Business Morning” and “Analytics” were altogether removed from [air](#).

“Business Contact”, “Business Morning” and “Analytics” continue to be broadcasted on Pirveli TV.

Imedi

31.08.2015 – TV Company “Imedi” [closed](#) two of the most highly rated talk shows “Reaktsia” and “Imedis Kvira”. Suspension of social-political shows was explained by the intention of the management to change the format of programs; although, as the host of the programs Inga Grigolia claimed, it was a political order and she had never been informed about the intention of the management to close down the programs.

05.05.2016 – the host and producer Shalva Ramishvili was sacked from Imedi. Imedi TV severed business relations with the companies of Ramishvili as well, which used to [prepare](#) various programs for the channel. According to Ramishvili, his dismissal had to do with interference by the Director General Giorgi Bakhtadze in his editorial activities. Ramishvili filed a complaint against Bakhtadze with the Board of the Charter of Journalistic Ethics, which later on [determined](#) violation of the second principle of the Charter. The given principle stipulates that it is inadmissible to force a journalist to act or express an opinion against his conscience while performing professional activities.

Pressure exerted on journalists

6.04.14 – Rustavi 2 claimed that secret video recording was being [performed](#) at the TV Company. 3 days after the announcement, the Prosecutor's Office released interim results; so far, no further details have been [publicized](#) on the findings of the investigation.

09.09.2015 – Eka Mishveladze stated that relevant authorities [had information](#) about her affair with Aleks Petriashvili even before the news about their relationship would become known to the public.

21.10.2015 – Nika Gvaramia stated that he was being [threatened](#) to have his personal life records publicized. The Prosecutor's Office launched an investigation, though results have not been disclosed to the public so far.

14.03.2016 – Inga Grigolia claimed that she was being [threatened](#) to have personal life records publicized.

It is noteworthy that no investigation has been initiated with regard to the given facts; the law enforcement authorities are not much effective in terms of studying the cases of pressure on journalists.

Over the past few years, there have been more than [15 cases of pressure](#) on regional media representatives from the local officials. Data collected by Transparency International - Georgia on such cases reveal that public officials do not fully realize the role of independent media and inadequately respond to journalists' critical materials. For the most part, pressure on journalists entails verbal abuse, threats and attempts to hinder fulfillment of their work. According to the inquiry, journalists in the regions of Kakheti and Adjara are the most frequent victims of duress. Facts of pressure were reported in Guria, Imereti, Samegrelo, Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti as well.

Gela Mtivlishvili, Head of Kakheti News Center reported the facts of pressure put by the local as well as central authorities. Journalists of "Trialeti" TV Company publicized [facts of pressure](#) by representatives of the local government. The newspaper "My Kharagauli" confronted the local authorities as well with charges of duress.

"Samkhretis Karibche" and "Guria News" also [reported](#) cases of intimidation. According to [employees](#) of "Samkhretis Karibche", following refusal to change the headline of the editorial material, they became victims of intimidation from the law enforcement authorities.

Journalists of "Guria News" also [reported](#) cases of insult by the Local Governor and the Mayor of Ozurgeti Municipality. One of the journalists of "Guria News" appealed to the Prosecutor's Office after Sophio Chanturia, advisor of Ozurgeti Mayor in public relations systematically used

to lambaste representatives of the local media, including “Guria News” and “Guria Moambe” in social network and threaten some media outlets with banning their activities and disclosing compromising secret recordings.

18.08.2016 – According to David Mchedlidze, editor of the “media.ge”, the police had interfered with his professional activities. Mchedlidze was covering the process of evicting one of the families in Rustavi. As the journalist [claimed](#), in order to expel him from the site, the policeman “pushed him away, grabbed him by the throat and forced him to drop down the camera”.

David Mchedlidze lodged a complaint with the Prosecutor’s Office, accusing the police of interfering with his professional activities and exerting physical pressure.

Public Broadcaster (the GPB)

20.12.2012 – the Supervisory Board appointed Giorgi Baratashvili as the Director General. Over the following one year, the Board twice dismissed Batiashvili from the held position, in both cases to be reinstated by decision of the court.

17.09.2013 – Journalists David Paichadze and Eka Kvesitadze [were sacked](#) from the Public Broadcaster, allegedly, due to their biased disposition. The given case cast doubt on the professional freedom enjoyed by journalists at the Public Broadcaster

12.07.2013 – amendments to the “Law on Broadcasting” took effect, whereby Adjara television was established as a public broadcaster. Before that, it used to operate as a department of the Government of Adjara; such arrangement contradicted the Law on Broadcasting, which prohibits ownership of the broadcast media by the administrative bodies.

The same amendments served to revise the rule of forming the Board of Trustees. Instead of previously set 15, composition of the Board was defined by 9 members. Three members are to be nominated by the parliamentary majority, three trustees – by members of the Parliament not belonging to the majority, two trustees – by the Public Defender and one member – by the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara. Members of the Board contended the clause of the reform, which envisaged premature termination of powers for a trustee. Meantime, two acting members left the Board of Trustees, leaving it [paralyzed](#) for a period of five months. Some members of the Board were referring to cases of pressure, giving rise to suspicions that premature dissolution of the Board could have been driven by political motivations. Later on, acting members of the Board, who were unable to take decisions due to lack of quorum, appealed to the Constitutional Court against pre-term suspension of their authorities. The Court [satisfied](#) the complaint and as a result, the Monitoring Board composed of the acting trustees was set up; the Parliament applied the amended rule to approve new composition of the Board.

Although passed legislative amendments aimed to assume more pluralistic approach towards formation of the Board, implementation of the reform explicitly showed that the Public Broadcaster still remained to be a political playground. Meantime, as the Parliament didn’t

approve two candidates nominated by the opposition till 2016, plurality envisaged by the law was not practically applied.

09.04.2015 – [Closure](#) of Eka Mishveladze’s program “Pirveli Studio” on the Public Broadcaster was explained by her marriage to one of the oppositional party leaders and resulting conflict of interest. During the meeting with media representatives at Holiday Inn, when asked by Eka Mishveladze to explain reasons for closing the program, former adviser of GPB Basa Janikashvili stated that there was conflict of interest and congruent to the Broadcasting Code, it was awkward when a journalist married to a political leader hosted a political program.

10.02.2016 – Eka Mishveladze [was fired](#) from office. The Journalist filed a lawsuit to the court.

13.06.2016 – The Parliament of Georgia [elected](#) four new members of the Public Broadcaster “Board of Trustees”. New members included: Irina Putkaradze – nominated by the Public Defender; Giorgi Nizharadze and Sulkhan Saladze – nominated by two different groups from at least ¼ of non-majority MPs; Iraki Papava – nominated by the factions from the parliamentary majority. Thus, the process of composing the Board of Trustees was ultimately finalized.

07.09.2016 – On the Election Day, the Georgian Public Broadcaster will hold exit polls together with three other private TV companies - Imedi, GDS and Maestro. [The decision](#) was adopted by the Board of Trustees on September 7 by a majority of votes. Two members of the Board, [Sulkhan Saladze](#) and Ketevan Mskhiladze were deliberately against the decision. As they stated, conducting exit polls with the mentioned TV companies jeopardized reputation and image of the Public Broadcaster. [Non-governmental organizations, Coalition for Media Advocacy](#) and [media experts](#) negatively assessed the adopted resolution and called on the Public Broadcaster to reconsider its position.

Suspended and Resumed Broadcasting by TV Companies

20.10.2012 – Third Channel of the Public Broadcaster “PIK” suspended its broadcasting; violation of the agreement terms was cited as the underlying reason. The Public Broadcaster has not resumed broadcasting of the third channel so far.

10.01.2013 – TV Company “Tabula” [began](#) broadcasting under the private license of LEPL Civil Development Fund; the given license was handed over by the TV Company “Georgia”, which used to be related to Defense Ministry until 2012 and was [owned](#) by Iago Chocheli, brother of a businessman Tsezar Chocheli. Following the elections, the channel ceded its license and stopped broadcasting. TV Company “Georgia” still remains to be one of the owners of Rustavi 2, whereas the company itself belongs to Karamanashvili brothers.

20.08.2013 – Ivanishvili family-owned Channel 9 [stopped](#) broadcasting. Despite interest by numerous groups, the outlet has not resumed broadcasting yet.

13.03.2015 – TV station of Bera Ivanishvili, Bidzina Ivanishvili's son was [granted](#) a general broadcasting license; the channel covers news programs and social-political shows. It was founded in June 2012 and originally used to be an entertainment channel.

05.02.2014 – TV Company “Iberia” [resumed](#) its broadcasting. Television of Zaza Okuashvili, owner of Omega Group, lost its license in 2004. Later on, the license turned out to belong to the Georgian Media Production, which is owner of Imedi TV as well. The given license, along with Imedi TV was returned to Badri Patarkatsishvili's family; later on, the Patarkatsishvili family transferred the license to Iberia TV.

14.01.2015 – TV Pirveli [obtained](#) a general broadcasting license and started covering of news programs and social-political shows. Before, the TV Company used to be called TVS and was mostly broadcasting sports programs.

Anti-Western Media Outlets and anti-western propaganda

Strengthening of anti-Western and pro-Russian propaganda in Georgian media outlets is another trend observed after the change of the Government in 2012 Parliamentary elections.

In recent years, a group of media outlets actively engaged in anti-Western media campaigns turned up. According to various [studies](#), the main source of anti-Western sentiments is right the media and most frequently, we come across anti-Western messages in xenophobic and homophobic contexts.

There are cases when anti-Western media outlets get budgetary funds as well in the form of advertising revenues. In case of some anti-Western campaigns, links of involved NGOs and media companies with Russian agencies can be traced as well.

In the report released in 2015 [“Who Owns the Georgian Media”](#), Transparency International-Georgia managed to identify owners of those online media outlets and the so-called “NGOs”, that were engaged in anti-Western and pro-Russian campaigns and meantime had direct connections with the pro-Russian organizations in Russia or Georgia – “Eurasian Institute” and “Eurasian Choice.”

Apart from the online media, a number of anti-Western media outlets and online TV channels turned up; they are actively engaged in dissemination of anti-Western and pro-Russian sentiments. We have made focus on the ownership of such media outlets as well. We've explored ownership of the following outlets and their connections with anti-western civil or political groups: LLC Georgian Channel (former “TV Kvitike”); LLC Georgian TV; LLC Quality Channel (“Dro TV”); LLC International News Agency Eurasia („New Georgia”); Patriot TV. Connections are obvious, though sources of funding for such media outlets give rise to numerous questions.

The mentioned group of pro-Russian and anti-Western media outlets has close and intensive links with the Georgian pro-Russian political parties, such as the “Patriotic Alliance” and the “Centrists”.

“One of the more surprising results is how anti-foreign-NGO sentiments, commonplace coming from Kremlin-controlled media within Russia, are spreading elsewhere” – Media Sustainability Index 2016 [Media sustainability Index, MSI 2016](#)

Advertising Market

Shortly after the government reshuffle, major changes affected the advertising sector as well. “General Media” – a monopolist company, which used to sell ads on national channels ceased to exist. Former Defense Minister David Kezerashvili, who was in charge of several large advertising companies in 2011 and 2012, disappeared from the advertising landscape. Some of his companies were transferred to the ownership of David Iakobashvili, a Georgian businessman based in Russia.

In 2014, the Revenue Service addressed the TV market measurement company TVMR Georgia with a request to disclose sensitive information, putting activities of the company at threat. A few months later, a new measurement company turned up. Presence of two TV measurement agencies and discrepancy between their figures lead to certain ambiguity in the market. Advertising revenues of broadcasters significantly dropped in 2015. Compared to the previous year, in 2015 advertising income declined by 33%, as declared by TV companies. The given downturn is due to tough economic environment and devaluation of GEL; though, legislative changes in the field of broadcasting have the lion’s share (changes reduced maximum minutes of advertising allowable per hour). Product placement on TV and radio outlets has become regulated as well to facilitate protection of consumer rights.

Georgian National Communications Commission

08.03.2013 – The Parliament [established](#) an interim investigation commission to study performance of the Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC). The commission presented its report to the Parliament in March 2014 and forwarded the materials to the Prosecutor’s Office.

15.4.2013- Irakli Chikovani, Chair of the Georgian National Communications Commission resigned from office. Before resignation, he had not showed up at work for several months. Later on, Chikovani [resigned](#) from the Commission membership as well.

01.11.2013 - The Parliament launched an impeachment of the GNCC Chair Karlo Kvitaishvili and [dismissed](#) him from the post. As a result, two vacant positions turned up. Following [expiry](#) of the term (March 2014) of the remaining three members Sophio Britanchuk, Akaki Sikharulidze and Irakli Moseshvili, staffing of the Commission started anew.

24.01.2014 – The Parliament [elected](#) Kakhi Bekauri, a former Director of TV9 Channel as a member of the GNCC.

16.04.2014 – The Parliament [approved](#) Vakhtang Abashidze to the position of the member of the GNCC at the second attempt. During the voting in March, neither Abashidze nor other candidates managed to [secure](#) sufficient number of votes. Zurab Abashidze, brother of Vakhtang Abashidze is a representative of Georgia in relations with Russia.

19.02.2015 – The Parliament [appointed](#) Eliso Asanidze, Merab Katamadze and Giorgi Pruidze as members of the GNCC and thus, all vacant positions were filled up. Katamadze used to be a member of the Republican Party; Natia Lazashvili, spouse of Pruidze, works at the PR department of the Government Administration.

Currently, reorganization is underway at the Georgian National Communications Commission. Organizational structure has been modified; it is planned to carry out staff certification process. Part of employees are dissatisfied with the ongoing reorganization.

11.02.2015 – post of the consumer rights public defender was introduced in the GNCC; the given position had not been [in place](#) since 2007. Tamta Tepnadze was appointed to the position of the Public Defender for Consumer Rights.

Widespread nepotism still remains to be a problematic and challenging issue. Presently, the Office of the Public Defender for Consumer Rights employs nephew of Zurab Tkemaladze, god son of Tkemaladze, former employee of Tkemaladze's committee Tamta Tepnadze, son of the MP Dimitri Khundadze. Natia Pangani, bridesmaid of Tepnadze also works as her assistant from 2015.

It is also noteworthy that before starting work at the Commission, Tamta Tepnadze used to work for the Sector Economy Committee, run by Zurab Tkemaladze.

Zurab Tkemaladze was heading the Commission, which approved Tamta Tepnadze as the Public Defender for Consumer Rights.