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State of Georgian media since the Rose Revolution

Master Thesis

by

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Abstract

Evaluation made by local and international organizations emphasizes that media freedom remains a significant challenge despite the fact that Georgian legislation defends freedom of speech and expression (the Law of Georgia on Broadcasting, the Law of Georgia on the Freedom of Speech and Expression, Constitution of Georgia). As a former soviet country Georgia does not have a big experience of media independence as following the soviet time media was under the pressure of interested individuals and government.

The situation has slightly improved since the Rose revolution, in which the media played a huge role with its biased coverage, however in recent years progress has been more significant. Despite challenges and problems, the Georgian media is now more balanced than before. The international community and organizations have played a large role in this, particularly ENP which came into force in 2004 with the aim of strengthening democratic institutions including media in the country.

Implementation of the ENP Action Plan is important for Georgia for two reasons: The Plan's priorities are focused on creating and developing democratic institutions, which will promote the country's overall democratic development. It will influence Georgia's potential of integrating with the European Union.

The Georgian government agreed to accomplish the following commitments as stated in ENP AP including "*Ensure freedom of the media. Encourage proper implementation of the Law of Georgia on Broadcasting and the Law of Georgia on Freedom of Speech and expression; Work towards adopting audiovisual legislation in full compliance with European standards with a view to future participation in international instruments of the Council of Europe in the field of media.*"¹

The media plays a big role in determining voters' final decision. Despite certain improvements in the media field its achievements and problems remain the same after the Rose Revolution. The major achievement is media pluralism and the lack of government censorship. Any

¹ The EU-Georgia Action Plan, http://ec.europa.eu/environment/enlarg/pdf/enp_action_plan_georgia.pdf

information which a journalist has made available for the public and every major political position, including radical ones, is expressed in the media. The main problem is the media's over-politicisation: the media owners think it is a tool for promoting political projects and not a business which responds to public demand. One of the problems the Georgian media faces is the lack of professionalism among journalists and a lack of will in the media to uphold professional standards.

The media plays a crucial role in a democratic society, as on one hand it informs people's attitudes and opinions about different political leaders and on the other hand it gives politicians an opportunity to assess the public mood, which makes it possible for all to participate in free political debates.

Having a media with overwhelming power is the same as having a weak, Government-controlled media. The media itself, particularly the Public Broadcaster, should be responsible to the people it serves. This can be enforced by adopting a regulation system and introducing organs of independent rule.

When talking about media freedom in Georgia, journalists and experts primarily focus on editorial policy, rather than the freedom to feature opposition politicians on talk shows. However, it should be noted that such an opportunity itself promotes the freedom to express political views and pluralism.

The owners of media outlets play the greatest role in determining a television station's editorial policy. Their directives are announced at meetings of producers with general directors. Producers are, in turn, in charge of communicating with journalists about what theme may be covered and how (including determination of the vocabulary used in connection with the theme). The phrase "it came down from above" has become a feature of journalists' speech.

This paper will cover the condition of the media in various states of the Soviet Union and try to describe the whole picture what kind of challenges the media had and how Georgian media developed from the ashes of the Soviet Union. As a case study I will highlight recent self-government elections in Georgia during which media monitoring was carried out, concluding that Georgia made a step forward in media sector

Abbreviations

EU	European Union
ENP	European Neighborhood Policy
ENP AP	European Neighborhood Policy Action Plan
FSU	Former Soviet Union
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
CRRC	Caucasus Research Resource Centre
IEOM	The International Election Observation Mission
PACE	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
PA	Parliamentary Assembly
NGO	Nongovernmental organisation
GPB	Georgian Public Broadcaster
UNM	United National Movement
CEC	Central Elections Commission

Introduction

In 1970s Georgian dissidents Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Merab Kostava begun publishing 'Golden Fleece' - an independent magazine. At that time the majority of Georgians did not believe it would ever be able to create any threat to soviet empire. Interestingly though, this idea was not shared by Soviet special services as they knew full well what kind of threat a free media could bring to a totalitarian regime. For that reason alone both Gamsakhurdia and Kostava were arrested.

Today there is no doubt that the media has a huge influence on formation of public opinion.

Polish leading anticommunist activist and first president after Communism, Lech Walesa said in 1993 that "the level and state of the mass media determine the development of democracy."

Despite the enthusiasm and euphoria that accompanied the anticommunist earthquake in the late 1980s, the anticipated societal and economic change for the region has proven to be a formidable task. Democratization in the former communist countries still has a long way to go. A deep rooted backward mentality and striving to resuscitate ailing economies hampers those Central and Eastern European nations in their aim to complete desperately needed reforms in all spheres, with the media being just one such area, an important part of the democratic process, as Walesa predicted.

In light of the significance of a promising legal culture in the creation of a democracy-building press in the region, I started an analysis of media laws in the former communist countries. I decided to study the entire whole former Soviet-controlled region of Europe, since these countries share a common political and cultural history, developing along the same lines.

Some former Soviet Union (FSU) countries have been successful in rebuilding the legal system, while others lag behind; all these young, struggling democracies are going through a painful transformation, with unforeseen obstacles and challenges. As Bernard J. Margueritte pointed out, the press reflects the checkered communist past: "Beset by weak professional training and standards, by intense competition, by an invasion of Western

investors, managers and press models, today the Eastern European press is at sea, freed of its old Communist moorings (or shackles), but without a clear course to sail.”²

While most post-communist regimes have abandoned the communist media legislation that was in place to serve the interest of a centralized power, some have replaced it with laws that in many cases are more draconian than the former communist ones in order to control the media and constraining journalists from reporting fairly and independently, just as it did in the communist era. Ray Hiebert advocates that this is because the post-communist rulers fear that a lack of legal control of the media will lead to chaos in these countries.³

This aim achieved, logically, the next step would be to rethink media development, making it more economics-oriented. Slavko Splichal said, “Deep economic crisis in the former socialist countries makes the question of an appropriate legal and financial encouragement of independent media even more urgent.”⁴

Many media outlets in FSU find it difficult to survive economically. It is hard to run private media in an economy where productivity is low, there is slow capital movement and advertising (and the associated revenue) is scarce. In spite of this, the media survives, although it is sometimes forced to compromise its independence in order to assure its financial survival and keep newspapers, radio and television stations afloat. It is more and more common for reporters to accept freebies, social invitations and other gifts, and of course they are wary of the threat of legal action (a common occurrence in countries of the FSU). Thus reporters are increasingly putting their own independence a risk. So it is clear that media development is intertwined with the state of the legal framework culture in these Eastern and Central European countries.

Finally let us think about public perception of the media as it is an important mechanism of democratic society. In a study of independent media, Price and Krug stated,

² RICHTER, Andrei. (2007). Post-soviet perspective on censorship and freedom of the media. Moscow: Izdatelstvo “IKAR”. 328 p. ISBN 978-5-98405-043-1.

³ Hiebert, Ray. “Transition: From the End of the Old Regime to 1996” in Eastern European Journalism

⁴ Splichal, Slavko. Media Beyond Socialism: Theory and Practice in East-Central Europe. Boulder: West view Press, 1994 (p.43)

“There is a close interaction between what might be called the legal-institutional and the socio-cultural, the interaction between the law and how it is interpreted and implemented, how it is respected and received. In this sense, another important factor to the enabling environment is the response of the citizenry.”⁵

⁵ Price, Monroe E. and Krug, Peter, op. cit.

Background

The Legacy of Communism

According to some communication experts, under communist regimes the media was successful in fulfilling its role as a transmission belt from the party to the people.⁶ The whole of communist-ruled Europe followed the same pattern. With regard for the Leninist belief that media and mass communication are a crucial part of the political process, Eastern and Central European rulers established a system whereby members of press had a privileged position. The most important channels of communication, television and radio were under the direct and firm control of the party. State-run TV and radio networks were the mouthpieces of the regime; heavy censorship ensured critics were stifled and that no contradictory, inflammatory or subversive opinions got in the way of the official flow of information. In this communist information system the media organs were completely centralised, with the communist party and its multi-layered structure at the head of the system.

In her book on media in Soviet Russia, Ellen Mickiewicz describes another feature that characterised the old, Soviet-type media system – saturation. Seeking total penetration of the potential audience, the Soviet leadership was in charge of approving the message pattern and content, and then sending it out to thoroughly dominate media output.⁷ According to the internal rules of the nomenklatura, only communist party members agreed upon by the Soviet political leadership could occupy the leading positions in mass media.

⁶ Post-Communism and the Media in Eastern Europe (edited by Patrick H. O’Neil). London; Portland, OR: F. Cass, 1997.

⁷ Mickiewicz, Ellen. Changing channels: television and the struggle for power in Russia. New York, Oxford University Press, 1997 and Mickiewicz, Ellen. Soviet Political Schools; the Communist Party Adult Instruction System. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1967.

This centralized system with media as a link in the chain of power survived in most European former communist countries. Its legacy plays a substantial, negative role in the recovery transition process that media is working to complete. Examining the evolution of former communist states, political theorists identified six key legacies.⁸ The first is the cultural legacy, with backwardness, victimization and intolerance as its main expressions. In the context of failed promises, and the brutal exercise of power and enforced political participation, Leninist regimes “prevented the emergence of a ‘public realm’ and instilled in their societies a deep distrust of government and general political passivity.”⁹

Another important legacy is social, due to the absence of an established successor elite. In the Communist era elites nurtured patron-client relations, aiming at achieving goals rather than building a merit-based bureaucracy. This legacy blocks the emergence of a liberal society in which there is mutual respect for rights. The political legacy of weak party systems with shallow roots, is also felt in the post-communist societies and can be seen in the lack of programmatic party platforms. National legacy is the interrupted process of nation-building in FSU countries; in particular it applies mainly to those FSU countries, where, in addition to communisation, a Russification process was forcefully imposed.

Changing state media outlets by making them quasi-commercial is the ultimate dangerous model, as they then become the slave of two masters, under state and commercial control, leaving no hope for free and independent reporting. The market has moved in and has pushed media outlets to open themselves to any and every source of funding, resulting in the stations being subjected to the worst of both worlds.

⁸ Political and Economic Trajectories in Post-Communist Regimes in *Liberalization and Leninist Legacies: Comparative Perspectives on Democratic Transitions* (Beverly Crawford and Arend Lijphart, editors). Berkeley, Calif.: International and Area Studies, 1997.

⁹ Jowitt, Kenneth. “Weber, Trotsky and Holmes on the study of Leninist regimes” in *Journal of International Affairs*, Summer 1991, p. 31-50. FIGHTING LEGACY: MEDIA REFORM IN POST-COMMUNIST EUROPE 4

At War with the Press

The reformation of the media and economic and political reform in the former communist countries are inextricably intertwined processes.¹⁰ While some of the former communist countries have made more progress in the process of democratisation, others have chosen to continue the authoritarian politics inherited from communism. More than a decade after the fall of communism, a new “Iron Curtain,” separating a substantially reformed Eastern European Bloc from a group of countries that have made slower progress, can be drawn from Estonia in the north all the way south to Slovenia. Countries like the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Slovenia and the Baltic states are demonstrating signs of economic and political growth. But going east to Belarus, Russia, Ukraine and Central Asia, the state of media reform is in shambles.¹¹

Declaring their independence from the Soviet empire in the early 1990s, many of the FSU countries faced a severe identity crisis. Some, such as Belarus, Moldova or conservative eastern Ukraine, have craved a Russian commonwealth directly subordinate to Moscow. On the other hand, the Central Asian nations for example, have reinvented their identities, but while they have rejected the Soviet influence, they draw on its worst feature – the authoritarian model for statehood. Forced to tolerate the dictatorship of the clans instituted by the new leadership in their countries, these nations’ efforts for reform lag far behind the rest of the Eastern Bloc. Soviet “iron fist” formulae have simply been replaced by their own styles of domestic dictatorship, their versions often being more repressive than those during Soviet times.

Facing authoritarian regimes loath to accept opposition and criticism, with distressed economies, media independence is virtually non-existent in every one of these nations

¹⁰ Jeff Trimble, director of broadcasting with the Congress-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty agreed with this. In an interview conducted in Washington, D.C., Trimble gave the example of Poland, where the post-communist leadership chose to speed up reform in the early 1990s and reaps the fruits of these reform policies today. Therefore, Poland has a free and vibrant media whereas in Armenia, for instance, the poor state of the economy has hindered media development.

¹¹ Mark Palmer, former U.S. Ambassador to Hungary and former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in charge of U.S. relations with the Soviet Union and East Central Europe.

isolated from the progress that is being made to their West. In his essay on the economic transition in post-communist countries, Lajos Brokos describes countries such as Belarus, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan as paradigms of “no-reform,” which have maintained central economic planning, with a significant share of financial and even physical resources still allocated by direct government decision, not by market forces.¹²

In a country like Belarus, where the population has an ingrained fear of opposing the leadership (a legacy of the Stalinist years) the media has resigned itself to a fate as a mouthpiece of the political leadership. A repressive system set up to serve the political power structure has purged the voice of dissent. An example is Pavel Sheremet, a former head of the Minsk bureau of Russia’s ORT television. In 1997, he was arrested and subsequently jailed after he had reported a link between smuggling networks operating at the Belarusian-Lithuanian border and the secret funds of the country’s president Alexander Lukashenko. Draconian media laws in Belarus stipulate a term of up to five years in prison for defamation of the president, while the Public Council on Implementing the Law on Press, a state-run body comprised of government-appointed members and editors working with the state media, ensures that this legislation is enforced. State institutions are instructed to withhold information and advertising revenue from private media outlets.¹³ Belarusian state television is used openly by the government to attack foreign diplomats, international organizations (such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe), and various human rights monitoring groups.

This condescending attitude of the government towards the media has ignited a dispute among journalists. Lawmakers have tried consistently to force the independent press out of business, while state media enjoys preferential treatment. The two camps, state and non-state, have engaged in endless feuds, ensuring public distrust of the press through a

¹² Brokos, Lajos. “Comments on Fischer and Sahay,” in *Transition and Growth in Post-Communist Countries: the Ten-Year Experience* (edited by Lucjan T. Orlowski). Cheltenham, UK; Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2001.

¹³ “Throughout 1999, the authorities used both old and new tools for harassing independent journalists. These ranged from the long-standing practices of ‘official warnings,’ the denial of official information, interference in printing houses, arrests, bullying and street beatings

non-stop cycle of attack and retaliation. Public cynicism towards the media, along with the intrinsic fear and insecurity in which Belarusian people live, have worsened the media's standing in this authoritarian state.

Post-Soviet Ukraine has been through a similar experience. In 1997, two Ukrainian journalists were killed, others beaten up and the authorities closed down a newspaper. Before parliamentary elections in 1998, the Ukrainian leadership used a whole host of legal tools to silence opposition newspapers and continued attacks against journalists. The country's criminal code, which specifies prison terms for libel was used to silence dissenting voices. The 1992 Law on Information contains a number of vague restrictions on information. For example, the press is forbidden from publishing information that calls "for an overthrow of the constitutional order, a violation of the territorial integrity of Ukraine." Stories promoting "propaganda for war, violence, cruelty, fanning of racial, national, [or] religious enmity" are also prohibited.¹⁴

In 1994, Ukrainian authorities instituted another law directed at the media, banning journalists from publishing any information that could be considered a "state secret." The vague definition of official state secrets, including such broad categories as defence, economy and foreign relations, gives the authorities numerous legal loopholes with which to control and silence journalists.¹⁵ The poorly funded Ukrainian judiciary, with judges unaware of the ever-changing legislation, contributed to the weakening of the media.¹⁶

All these actions against a free media helped incumbent president Leonid Kuchma secure re-election in 1999, just a year before another huge scandal further harmed the already poor image of the country. Gyorgy Gongadze, an editor with the Internet newsletter "Pravda Ukrayiny," whose reports had been renowned for their critical tone toward the

¹⁴ Ukraine in IJNet archives

¹⁵ "Comparative Analysis of Independent Media Development in Post-Communist Russia and Ukraine," published by Internews-Russia. July 1997.

¹⁶ "Ukraine Media Analysis." IREX/ProMedia – Ukraine.

Ukrainian government, disappeared in September 2000. Two months later, the journalist's decapitated corpse was found outside Kiev. President Kuchma has been accused of ordering this murder.¹⁷

Soviet Dictatorship Ends

A significant factor of the Soviet legacy in Eastern and Central Europe is a mentality, inherited by both the political establishment and the society, which bred in a fear-based relationship between the state and its citizens. A consequential product of this legacy is the revival of authoritarianism in some of the FSU countries. By keeping the repression-oriented leadership and centralized economies, the dictatorships that survived the fall of communism deterred foreign investment and discouraged Western aid essential for rebuilding their bankrupt states. Such an oppressive political and economic environment with coercive legislation and excessive limitations was a huge obstacle to the development of independent media.

As well as the dictatorships operating in the countries that were directly subjugated to Russian ideology until two decades ago, another part of the Soviet legacy that has survived in many of the former FSU nations is the dictatorial behaviour of the political leaders in the region. Although most of the post-socialist leaders outwardly professed their democratic beliefs for appearance's sake, dictatorial behaviour has frequently surfaced even in some of the states boasting more developed democracies. These autocratic politicians have hindered the evolution of the legal culture in the former communist countries, wielding substantial influence on post-socialist media policies.

With the collapse of the Soviet empire and its system of ideological, political and economic control over its subordinate nations, the spectrum of political opportunities increased and allowed the emergence of a new wave of national dictators. But with anti-

¹⁷ The Ukrainian president was accused of playing a major role in Gongadze's murder. Despite this and other political scandals, such as corruption and systematic use of the police and security forces against political opponents, Kuchma repeatedly refused to resign. On the contrary, he kept on maintaining a strong grip on power. (See Ukraine in IPI Report, 2001.)

communist revolutions and people seeking democratic reforms, post-socialist leaders were compelled to make concessions such as free press, political pluralism, elections and free markets.

Georgian media after Soviet Union

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union collapsed and Georgia gained independence, there were two major factors influencing the Georgian media: national or state intervention and international global demands. Unlike the Russian media outlets, which could draw on their Soviet era experience, the Georgian media had had no media outlets they could truly call their own – they were imposed by and dictated to from the Soviet hub – Moscow. Secondly, the level of education in schools of journalism was extremely low and unsatisfactory, a possible explanation being that Soviet policies were such that they inhibited the formation of qualified specialists in the republics. Similar trends were visible in other fields of academia, with the top specialists and scholars being invited to work in Russia.¹⁸

After independence other a new issues began to influence the situation among the media: the near total collapse of the economy, mass poverty and vast unemployment. These were viewed as a consequence of the breaking away from old Soviet connections. Economic problems were intensified by political problems. Throughout the 1990s, Georgia was in reality not really a state, despite gaining independence. The country experienced many hardships, including civil war, loss of territories and many other changes.

As a result of the state of the country's affairs a new media emerged. The outlets needed to secure of funding and its professionals had to acquire fresh professional standards and adopt a whole new way of working. And all this while the authorities continuously tried exert its influence, dictate what they should cover and impose their own goals and interests.

Under Z. Gamsakhurdia there could be no talk of a 'free media'; only two state TV channels existed, and they were used by the president's followers to urge the population to fight the

¹⁸ Berekashvili Tamar (2009) Trends in Georgia's Mass Media after the Rose Revolution

Enemy i.e. 'pro-Russian forces', 'red intelligentsia', etc. The printed press displayed greater independence but its circulation was small and irregular. The major printed edition was the newspaper 'Sakartvelos Respublika', and it was completely governmental.

It was during the presidency of Eduard Shevardnadze that the Georgian media first began to experience some freedom of speech; these initiatives were supported by Western funds.¹⁹

Media, Politics and Standards

Ever since Georgia became independent in 1991, issues of freedom of speech and the independence of the mass media have regularly surfaced during difficult periods. This was particularly true during the periods when power was changing hands, which in Georgia's case usually included the use of force, through coups and revolutions. Almost all opposition protests have been accompanied with criticism of information policy and requirements of independence of mass media.

Today a great deal of political information is actually disseminated by mass media. However, hopes that censorship and pressures on media, particularly on TV may transpire to be premature. The events of November 2007 showed that the fight for independence and media freedom was not easy, and it has to be continued. While in Tbilisi, the capital, the fight has brought victory with newspapers and TV channels being able to disseminate more complete information including oppositional opinions and views, in the regions, in the regions the situation is very different.

During the Soviet period, journalism was associated with 'correct and competent' descriptions of information as prescribed from above, and this information was nothing more than statements of the main principles and knowledge of the Communist Party of Soviet Union.

¹⁹ Berekashvili Tamar (2009) Trends in Georgia's Mass Media after the Rose Revolution

After the collapse of the communist regime it became completely devoid of such content and had to formulate anew its goals and purposes. In this regard there was considerable assistance from different international programmers, for example overseas training for journalists. This assistance came mainly from European and other Western states who wished to share their experience. It should be noted that there were many newcomers entering the field of journalism. Incidentally and rather interestingly, many of those who worked in the media during Soviet times, and even during Z. Gamsakhurdia's rule, left the profession.²⁰

In newly established mass media outlets, information has lost the status of knowledge and has turned into opinion, narrated by separate journalists and politicians. However, for a rather long time, and to some extent, even now, printed information is still a source of primary facts and opinions for some people, especially the elderly. It is very rare for the new generation of young people who have entered the field of journalism to have benefitted from an education in journalism. They started work, acquiring necessary skills as they went along. Unfortunately, as a consequence, they are often biased, do not follow main ethical norms, and are excessively pushy and partial. A large number of media outlets (newspapers, television and radio channels) endeavoured to minimize these weaknesses and continue to spread relatively complete information among the population.²¹

In addition to the domestic conditions described above, the media in Georgia operates in a global context. Independence brought Georgia the rights and responsibilities to act in accordance with global international requirements and standards. This means not only informing its own population about world events, but also establishing international connections and disseminating information about Georgia abroad. Previously, during the Soviet era, this external role was fulfilled by Moscow.* New realities and the broadening of rights, freedoms, functions, and challenges led to new 'professional types', the so-called 'experts' appearing and developing in Georgia. These individuals, specialists in one field or another, now often act as opinion makers. They provide analysis and commentary on major

²⁰ Berekashvili Tamar (2009) Trends in Georgia's Mass Media after the Rose Revolution

²¹ Berekashvili Tamar (2009) Trends in Georgia's Mass Media after the Rose Revolution

events for the public, and thus are influential. The number, qualification and areas of interests of such experts increases year upon year.

Legislation

In June 2004 a new law on freedom of speech was adopted.²² There had previously been several versions of the law, developed not only by the government but also by non-governmental organizations such as the Freedom Institute, together with representatives of mass media. On 10 August 1991 the Law on Press and Other Media was adopted – it was one of the first legislative acts of the independent Georgia. Some of the articles of this law were revised in 1997 and the main issues, relating to the regulation of functioning of the media, were eventually passed into the sphere of other legislation acts.

In 1999 the Georgian Parliament approved the Law on Press and Freedom of Speech which was superseded in 2004 by the adoption of the new law (Law on Freedom of Speech and Expression). Critics consider the new law to be less liberal than the former one, although the 1999 law was criticized for being too liberal, for giving journalists excessive rights and freedoms, and for not banning expressions of ultra national, fascist and racist character. The current law deals specifically with measures envisaged in cases of insulting officials and the presentation of false information. However, there were no sensational incidents related to these articles.

On the other hand, the cases of insulting journalists are quite frequent, including offence and various forms of protests both from authorities and opposition against information coverage. One example was the protest from the entire ruling elite (members of parliament and

²² Law on Freedom of Speech and Expression in Georgia, 24 June 2004

government) against the TV company Imedi. They all refused to give interviews to journalists from this company and refused to participate in televised debates and talk shows.²³

Economic Factors

In Georgia, influence on the media is exerted using economic instruments rather than state regulation. However, worth noting is that after the Rose Revolution state control was strengthened and in some cases the state interfered in the work of media directly and in coercive manner. The November incident with Imedi TV is just one example. It was interference from the state and ruling structures that made 35 journalists unify and establish the Unity of Independent Journalists (June, 2008). The first steps have been taken and the organisation is expected to involve more journalists in future.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, mass impoverishment of the population occurred. Newspaper circulation fell, TV was able to broadcast on only two channels, and this was further exasperated due to the lack of electricity. The role of radio increased. In a short period of time, the number of radio stations sharply increased, and they continue to broadcast today. Their popularity remains high although information programmes are rare and short. At present most radio-channels play a role mainly in entertainment

Funding remains the main problem for the mass media. Georgia is a small country (with a population of just over 4 million) and the number of potential media consumers is not large. This limits the market for advertising, which is particularly important for television. All TV channels, except the public broadcaster, are privately owned, but in a situation where loyal channels have support from the state, most television companies turn out to be pro-governmental. At present there is only one television channel that is independent from government influence, namely Kavkasia. The rest have ceased to function due to a lack of

²³ Berekashvili Tamar (2009) Trends in Georgia's Mass Media after the Rose Revolution

financial resources. Their work is blocked in every possible way. Even Kavkasia is prevented from broadcasting nationwide and can be viewed only in Tbilisi.

Georgia's economy has experienced uneven development, and one consequence is that production is concentrated in the capital, Tbilisi. In the regions, local markets are extremely poor and the local media does not possess the economic basis required for independence. Some mass media outlets exist by receiving grants, which in reality decreases their independence. Frequently, funding comes from the state. For example the TV company Rustavi 2 receives special financial support from the state, which decreases people's trust towards it.

The Press

The majority of Georgian newspapers are independent, and at present the printed press is the most independent form of media. This can be explained by the fact that political authorities are less interested in the press. Circulation of newspapers is low and the majority of population has no access to the press because cannot afford it. State institutions have even stopped analyzing the press because if it holds opposition opinions they are considered non-threatening. Authorities focus their attention primarily on television and radio; however, as was mentioned above radio content is generally less political.

The maximum circulation of daily newspapers is 80,000, and even this is gradually decreasing. Readers evaluate the quality of the press as unsatisfactory. Journalists, themselves, are also aware of the low quality of their product. Some experts explain the situation by a lack of professionalism – the old professional journalists have left; they could not adapt to new reality and young ones do not have the necessary education. Many journalists came from other fields, and even those who graduated from higher education establishments often do not have required journalistic education. The system of education is under reform, but many changes have not had a positive impact or they are not training specialists, including journalists.

Newspapers are no longer a source for current affairs. Television has taken on the role of informing the population about political issues. As for the press, it mainly publishes comments and evaluation, opinions and viewpoints. This is true of both daily and weekly newspapers, and monthlies even more so. It is often impossible to find description of events in the press - there are only comments and as a result the reader is unable to grasp the topic of discussion. This particularly concerns legal information which should be described in more detail. Thus, the press is not take advantage of its strengths, the fact that it can provide a detailed description of facts and events, hence it loses out to the competition - television, etc.

The Georgian print media does not always meet western standards, largely because they do not publish facts, meaning actual information without a commentary. Usually, in the western press, there are special pages for personal opinions, comments and interviews. In the Georgian press, there is actually no information except short statements from agencies. Furthermore, headlines are, as a rule, loud and do not always correspond to the content. Articles and their titles often present the facts one-sidedly and suggest ready-made solutions and judgments to readers. As a result, readers can either agree with ready-made judgments or reject them. They have no opportunity to make their own judgements.

As a whole, the Georgian printed media is completely politicised, although it should be noted that during last few years they have tried to cover global news and world events (but this is on the whole, simply reprinted from the foreign press.) The press writes a great deal about the political and public elite in general and about people who are somehow associated with politics, so that modern political figures have become a part of mass culture. All similar publications have the air of a yellow press; readers' concerns are not reflected; nothing is written about ordinary citizens, their values and interests are not visible, and regional news is almost absent.²⁴

²⁴ Berekashvili Tamar (2009) Trends in Georgia's Mass Media after the Rose Revolution

Television

There are 10 national television channels in Georgia, and a few regional ones. Before the parliamentary elections of 2003, six of these covered political news to some extent, but since then the situation with television has been changing rapidly.

Prior to 1999, the Ministry of Communications distributed frequencies and regulated the telecommunications sector. After the Law on Postal and Telecommunication was adopted in 1999, a National Commission on Communications in Georgia was established. Until the Revolution of 2003, its main function was regulatory. The Commission had three members and it succeeded in significantly liberalizing the sphere of telecommunications. In 2003, new legislative acts were adopted. As a result, the State Television Corporation and Adjara TV were formally reorganized into public broadcasters. However, most of the population continues to view them as state broadcasters. Before the Rose Revolution, television, like other mass media, was characterized by much more diversity with a higher level of pluralism than today.

It is well known that the theory of journalism distinguishes three ideal types of broadcast institutions: state owned, publicly owned and privately owned, commercial broadcasting. In the last decade, a fourth type of broadcast institution has appeared which focuses on political broadcasting, aiming not only to present relatively complex information in the field of world politics (CNN, BBC), but also to influence audiences in a political sense. Objective and independent political broadcasting can significantly promote intensification of the democracy in countries like Georgia. Unfortunately, Georgian the political channels, as mentioned above, try to influence the population in accordance with the interests of ruling structures. All other companies which do not respond to these interests are perceived as oppositional both by power structures and the population. Different sanctions are applied to these channels, often including closure.

After the Rose Revolution, several non-governmental television channels operated in Tbilisi: 202, Imedi, Kavkasia and Iberia. By November 2007 only one TV channel remained:

Kavkasia. It is less popular compared to the others, in part because it broadcasts only in Tbilisi, in part because the company is poor and thus cannot keep correspondents in different regions of Georgia, or produce interesting programming such as televised political debates. Yet despite repeated attacks from the authorities (seizure of its building, numerous broadcast interruptions) the company continues to operate. The fate of the other companies was difficult. 202 and Iberia were forced to close for economic and political reasons. Imedi was attacked and robbed in November 2007; many of its journalists were intimidated. Following the death of the owner of the channel, Badri Patarkatsishvili, the channel was taken over by pro-governmental forces and resumed broadcasting, but as an entertainment channel. In August 2008 the channel revived its news programs, but they are not considered by population as 'objective'. Channel Mze also lost its political content. The private TV company was launched in 2000, but gradually all its objective journalists quit and it is now exclusively an entertainment channel. The company Maestro aired political debates, but only for a few months. The formerly independent channels Alania, Adjara and the most popular Rustavi 2 have all become government supporters.

Popular attitudes towards television are in general positive. It is interesting that Imedi and Rustavi 2 were more often watched by audiences because they liked these channels, while the Public First Channel was watched by audiences who 'liked it more than they disliked it and tuned in sometimes or seldom. Most complaints about the public broadcaster were about bias and lack of objectivity, while Imedi and Rustavi 2 were generally considered more professional and reliable.

Public First Channel's audiences were mainly middle-aged people, and this explains its high popularity in villages. Rustavi 2's audience is mostly determined by the level of education, while female respondents expressed slightly more positive attitudes towards Imedi. Despite the fact that the Imedi channel was considered oppositional by the authorities, respondents of the poll did not feel this was the case, and did not distinguish the tone of its reporting as different from Rustavi 2 or the Public First Channel. That said, Rustavi 2 viewers tended to be government supporters, and the channel was regarded by most respondents as the most 'pro-

governmental'. In contrast, Imedi was considered the most objective, reliable and best at representing the population's problems and moods.

Among the most popular formats were talk shows, particularly on human rights issues, weekly information programmes, covering more or less all the week's interesting events, as well as serials and comedies. Intellectuals enjoy watching non-Georgian programmes, such as Mezzo or Kultura, and the church-owned Evrika channel that broadcasts old, favourite films aimed at preserving traditional values is also popular.

In conclusion, it could be said that the Georgian media is not going through the best of times, for objective and subjective reasons. Their current status and level are similar to that in other post-Soviet countries. From the point of view of freedom and independence, they may be in a better situation than media in the Central Asia states, Azerbaijan and even Russia. On the other hand, in terms of professional skills of journalists, they are inferior, compared to say, Russian journalists. The Russian media is also more diverse in terms of programming, since it has many shows on culture, science, history, and the non-political commentaries are diverse. For objective reasons described above, Georgian media suffers from low levels of journalistic education.²⁵

A second challenge is globalisation. Georgian journalists have largely failed to engage with international media in a significant way, both in terms of reporting on global news and presenting the news of Georgia to the world. This problem is not acute but still it highlights the weaknesses of the Georgian media. And last but not least, journalists have only recently managed to unify, to set up an association, not only to protect their rights but to develop the code of conduct, standards and ethical norms. Although many journalists have participated in preparatory courses and training, both in Georgia and abroad, there remains a need for a common approach, internal goals, needs, awareness of special responsibility. However, journalists have confidence in themselves, in their importance and permissiveness. Although they feel their importance, they hold no real power except as cultural figures. Many journalists

²⁵ Berekashvili Tamar (2009) Trends in Georgia's Mass Media after the Rose Revolution

are associated with the elite, and as such public attitudes towards them are similar to the attitude towards members of parliament, officials and authorities of the middle and high levels. However, the situation is changing. Recent events, such as the November 2007 protests, the January 2008 presidential election and the parliamentary election of May 2008, demonstrated that the euphoria surrounding TV power is decreasing and journalists are taking steps to protect not only their rights but also freedom of speech in Georgia.

Media's role in Colour Revolutions

The media played a central role in the forming the Colour Revolutions that brought about change of regimes in Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan. Without the role of media structures such as B-92 radio station in Belgrade, Rustavi-2 TV station in Tbilisi, Channel-5 in Kyiv, and the Maya Stalitsa-Novosti newspaper in Bishkek, it is hard for one to imagine any popular mobilization could take place to instigate peaceful regime change. However there exists a gulf between the role played by the media in opposing the old regimes and its role following the revolutions. The Colour Revolutions failed to bring a new era of media development in which journalists uncover secrets and break past political and social taboos. The media appears docile, seeming to have lost its former militancy, as if it is ready to serve the new political authorities, and increasingly ready to serve the new capitalists. The Soviet media under *glasnost* broke taboos and made ground-breaking investigations about the past and the present, but the media that materialised out of the Colour Revolutions did not ask embarrassing questions and did not investigate the fertile material of a decade's worth of corruption in mass privatization, appropriations of public goods, assassinations.²⁶

The Colour Revolutions could have sparked a new media culture liberating journalism and reporters from their dependence on political powers. Why did it fail? And how is it that the few media outlets which played a strategic role in effecting the Colour Revolutions in the name of good governance and democracy no longer work critically and effectively? Here we argue that media development failed in FSU nations not only because of internal developments but

²⁶ Cheterian, Vicken (2009) Colour Revolutions and the Media: Where is the Scoop?

also due to external influences. We will show how the old Soviet practice of journalists serving the party-state and its goals has developed during the transition with its associated conditions and how the new mass media was bound to serve the emerging business and political elite. Despite vast international aid to cultivate independent journalism, too frequently, the West's message was corrupted by their efforts to employ the mass media for value-charged behavioural change. Donors also used the media for presenting both the West in general and the work of their agencies and programmes in particular, in a good light, once more undermining the independence of journalism to serve political interests. Finally, those independent media that had acted to oppose the ancient regimes considered their role to be for political opposition and ultimately of political change, rather than to provide the public with information independently and without political interest. There was no scoop from the Colour Revolutions as a result of the failure for the development of an independent mass media that strives to inform the public rather than serve the interests of political elites.

In conclusion, the role and evolution of the media in the framework of Colour Revolutions could help us comprehend the character of those revolutions and their function in the process of political change in post-Soviet and post-Yugoslav societies. It could also facilitate a more thorough understanding and broaden the debate about how the West perceived democracy and democratisation in those societies, policies adopted to promote good governance, and their limitations.²⁷

With the fall of the Soviet Union, the political and institutional establishment that had shaped Soviet state-controlled media collapsed. New media organisations founded on new rules regarding the practice of journalism needed to be established. However more than fifteen years since the end of the Soviet era, the transformation of the mass media did not bring about a new set of clear definitions on principles of journalism, rather an ambiguous grey blend of some elements of journalistic practices dominated by political propaganda and public

²⁷ Cheterian, Vicken (2009) Colour Revolutions and the Media: Where is the Scoop?

relations technique, a corruption that does not clarify the media's role in the new societies, leading to public distrust and a deep crisis within the profession.²⁸

Soviet journalism was a profession with peculiar rules; it could only function in the overall conditions of the Soviet regime. It was not about reporting real facts and events from the editorial offices' door to inform the public, so that based on this knowledge people could make electoral choices and bring about policy changes. A journalist's job was to educate the masses on how to behave to achieve the ideals of the Communist Party. The journalist had to pass on the illuminated knowledge of the elite (which was supposedly leading the working class) about the ideals of the communist society, to the entire population, teach them how to conform and behave correctly as Soviet citizens in order to transform the current society into the classless Utopia of the future. Soviet reporting had a *raison d'être* and a mechanism by which it functioned - propaganda - which has rules far removed from those defined as journalism.

Although it was essentially a propaganda machine, in some respects the media institution had more freedom, pluralism and diversity than other social institutions. Freedom was more significant in print media than in electronic media, where television broadcasts in particular were under heavy scrutiny.²⁹ The authorities tolerated a limited number of critical articles focusing on social issues such as corruption or ecological problems; some journalists could make implicit hints for some readers to find by reading between the lines. Another function of the media was to prepare public opinion for future changes. For instance if a certain official was out of favour, in order to prepare for his expulsion party-dominated papers would publish material about his faults and inadequacies, after which the person was immediately discharged. Ironically, while the Soviet media was far removed from reality in its ideological coverage, it could all the same 'predict' the future - and not only in its weather forecast. As a

²⁸ Vicken Cheterian and Nina Iskandaryan, eds. 2006. *Postsovyetskiye SMI, at Prapagandi k Zhurnalistike*, Caucasus Media Institute, Yerevan.

²⁹ Sarah Oates. 2005. "Media and Political Communication," in *Developments in Russian Politics 6*, ed. Stephen White, Zvi Gitelman and Richard Sakwa 114-129. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

result, the media and reporters enjoyed prestige among the population unequalled by other professions. 'People will take a grievance to the office of a newspaper but never think of going to the representative they have voted for in single candidate elections' observed a Western reporter.³⁰

The relationship between the journalistic community and the rest of the society was a special one. The journalist had to be loyal to the party and follow the official line. Very limited 'dissent'³¹ was tolerated on the pages of printed editions, even less in electronic broadcasting. In return, the state guaranteed the work conditions and the material well-being of journalists. This could mean creating editorial offices, supplying cameras or paper, to paying salaries and offering resort holidays to journalists and their families. The readers, or the audience, had little influence over the content of the mass media, and naturally the opinion of the public mattered less and influenced even less the work of journalists.

The Soviet journalist was oriented towards the ruling elite in every sense. The journalist community received its orders, its working conditions, finances, even bonuses and vacation arrangements from the ruling elite, and in return it expressed its loyalty towards the Communist Party and its shifting policies. In some cases, the name of the journalist was signed under an article by party officials, without the prior consent of the journalist.³²

The Soviet public understood those rules, and treated the media accordingly. The propagandist machine could function only under the forcibly imposed total monopoly of the media sector. Citizens were obliged to subscribe to official papers, foreign literature was restricted, contact with foreigners limited, and access to alternative news sources blocked. In spite of all this the Soviet state was never completely successful in imposing a total blockade of information on the peoples, and a high percentage of citizens were regularly able to follow

³⁰ Patrick Cockburn, "Second Chance for Soviet Media," *Financial Times*, January 29, 1987

³¹ The term 'dissent' is the appropriate description since any critical reporting was considered strange and subversive.

³² Felicity Barringer, "Pravda Writer Disavows Article on Armenia," *New York Times*, March 23, 1988

foreign broadcasts with their alternative perspective on news on the Soviet Union and international developments.

As party-state control eased the situation changed. As enthusiastic journalists tasted freedom, they gradually discovered the possibility to reveal taboos, opportunities to reveal the truth about the past, and contrast it with the officially sanctioned lies. During this period of excitement, the concerns of the journalists and that of the public concurred. The public was hungry for news about the changing conditions of their own society, and the exposure of past secrets of the Soviet state that journalists eagerly reported. For the first time in history the Soviet journalist experienced genuine popularity; this was the honeymoon period between the public and the media; the fifteen minutes of glory for journalists.

The substance of Moscow based media and that of Yerevan or Baku based media differed, but each had its public and worked accordingly according to the local concerns and tendencies. There was of course concern over the general future of the USSR and the increasing controversy between Soviet and Russian leadership. In the republics however, and especially in the South Caucasus there were other specific local concerns and the alliance of the media with the newly rising popular, nationalist movement. The liveliest media to develop in Central Asia was that in, Tajikistan, but it was short-lived as it was consumed in the fires of the civil war (1992-1997) during which more than seventy journalists were killed. Later, the prevailing opinion in Tajikistan was that the media freedoms 'provoked the war', an idea still ingrained years after the signing of the Tajik peace agreement of 1997.

The Role of Media in Making the Colour Revolutions

In October 2001 more than thirty security officers tried to enter the Rustavi-2 independent television channel, supposedly to carry out an investigation into tax evasion. Originally a private TV channel, Rustavi-2 was founded a few years previous in the industrial town of Rustavi south-east of the Georgian capital but later moved to Tbilisi to become the most popular, and highly critical media institution. Rustavi-2's coverage of corruption in top governmental circles had clearly hit a nerve. Some months earlier, in July 2001 Giorgi Sanaia,

a leading investigative reporter from Rustavi-2 was found dead in his apartment. He had been investigating corruption among the political elite.³³ Determined to crack down on the station, the authorities, closed down Rustavi-2. The management, instead of opening their doors and books to, refused to admit the officers. Instead, the television station broadcast the confrontation live.³⁴ Thousands of people gathered at the entrance of the television station – at the time the most popular in Tbilisi. In the days that followed, tens of thousands of people congregated in front of the Georgian parliament, to defend media freedom, calling for the resignation of the government.

It is hard to picture the Colour Revolutions, peaceful pressurised oustings of autocratic regimes as a result of popular mobilization, without independent media bodies. The major difference between the Velvet Revolution of 1989 and the Colour Revolutions is that the former was the sudden downfall of a totalitarian regime, while the latter occurred in semi-autocratic systems, in which the where the state tried but failed to control the public space. Georgia's Rustavi-2 events in 2001 led to the collapse of the Georgian government and the weakening of the ruling Citizens' Union of Georgia. Members of the CUG left – some the 'Young Reformers' such as Zurab Zhvania and Mikheil Saakashvili would go on to lead the Rose Revolution two years later.

The Rustavi-2 example in which the media helped focus the struggle and leading to a revolution is not unique. Likewise in Serbia 'B92' an independent radio station was the caught up in the struggle between the state attempting to silence its critics, and opposition groups that tried to defend the much-needed freedom of expression. Founded in 1989, this radio station was first forcibly shut down in 1991, only to be put back on air in a matter of days. The radio station reported on the 1996 student protests against mass electoral violations by the Milosevic regime, thus informing the public and helping to mobilize the opposition. Consequently As a result, B92 was once more closed down. However it was soon on the air

³³ Giorgi Sanaia, a Famous Georgian Journalist, was Found Murdered in His Own Flat, Civil Georgia, July 27, 2001: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=94&search=Giorgi%20sanaia%20was%20found>

³⁴ Alex Lupis, Faded Colors, Committee to protect Journalists, May 9, 2007

again, reflecting the delicate balance of power in society between the ruling regime and the opposition. In 1999, as NATO attacked Yugoslavia, the authorities took over the B92 studios, using them to broadcast official programmes, only to help the radio station move to the Internet from where it continued to broadcast.³⁵

Ukraine experienced a similar scenario to Georgia. The first mass movement protesting against the autocratic ruling party crystallised around yet another assassinated investigative journalist, Heorhii Gongadze. Working for *Ukraiins'ka Pravda*, a web-based news magazine, Gongadze criticised corruption in the Kuchma regime. He disappeared in September 2000. His decapitated corpse was discovered two months later in the outskirts of Kiev. Three weeks after his body was found, a member of the opposing Socialist party, Oleksandr Moroz revealed in parliament the existence of tape recordings of a conversation of Kuchma directly implicating the Ukrainian President in the murder of Gongadze.³⁶ This 'Cassette Scandal' as the event is known in Ukraine sparked popular movement demanding the resignation of Kuchma. Many thousands of people demonstrated in downtown Kiev from December 2000 to March 2001. This movement, known as 'Ukraine without Kuchma' was the forerunner of the Orange Revolution. Emphasising the importance of media in the instigating changing political processes, the Ukrainian opposition founded Channel 5 television station in 2003, a station that played a vital role in the Orange Revolution.

In addition, the media played another, a more immediate role. The Colour Revolution phenomena were non-violent regime changes that took place following contested elections,³⁷ Following mass electoral fraud, a coalition of opposition forces, often led by former members of the ruling elite, reject the legitimacy of the official results, and call for mass protests. Without independent or opposition-leaning media capable and willing to publicise news about electoral violations, and the calls of the opposition candidate for civil disobedience, protest acts would be limited to the politically engaged minority and fail to

³⁵ 'Radio B92 – off the air but on the Net,' BBC News, Wednesday, march 24, 1999

³⁶ 'Schemes and Scandals in Ukraine,' The Economist, January 20, 2001

³⁷ David Anable, 2005. "The Role of Georgia's Media – and Western Aid – in the Rose Revolution."

initiate mass action. In turn, this would mean autocratic regimes needed to use only minimal force to suppress dissenters. The corrupt regimes were reluctant to use force against the opposition as the demonstrations swelled to tens of thousands, after which elite coherence started to crack, with even parts of the armed forces became neutral or even pro-opposition.³⁸ In summary, a few independent/pro-opposition media played key roles firstly as a source for initial contests between pro-regime and dissident forces, and then as important instruments to help effect mass mobilization making possible the phenomenon of a peaceful revolution.

³⁸ Michael Mcfaul. 2005. "Transitions from Post-communism," *Journal of Democracy*

Methodology

Qualitative content analysis, case study and comparative analysis will be used as the basic means of research methodology for developing the given paper.

Research strategy is deductive, where explanation is achieved by constructing a deductive argument to which the phenomenon to be explained is the conclusion. Here, the discussion process is directed from general view to more specific one.

The major research question is What kind of progress Georgia made since the rose revolution and Does Georgian media meet its European Neighborhood Policy Action Plan Commitments.

The researcher starts the paper with general overview of media field in the Soviet time, however it is followed by the Georgian media condition since the Rose Revolution and as a case study researcher presents recent local elections in Georgia held in May, 2010.

The research questions of the case were as such: What were the major topics the news programmes covered during pre-elections campaign? (Agenda setting theory is used) And how much time were allotted for each mayor's candidate while their campaigning.

There are used three types of data: Primary (collected by the researcher); Secondary (collected by some other researcher and are used in their raw form) and Tertiary (secondary data that have been analyzed by someone else)

Comparative analysis are being used in order to make comparison Soviet time Media to Post Soviet time and Georgian media in the first years of the Rose Revolution to Georgian media today.

Elections media coverage after the Rose Revolution

Following the events of November 2003 that led to Georgia's Rose Revolution in which President Eduard Shevardnadze was overthrown, Georgia held two elections in 2004. The first was in January when Mikheil Saakashvili was elected president, while the second was in March – parliamentary elections.

Repeat Parliamentary Election, Georgia – 28 March 2004

The International Election Observation Mission (IEOM) for the 28 March partial repeat parliamentary election in Georgia is a co-operative undertaking of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR), the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), and the European Parliament (EP).

The 28 March 2004 repeat parliamentary election in Georgia demonstrated commendable progress in relation to previous elections. The Georgian authorities have seized the opportunity, since the 4 January presidential election, to bring Georgia's election process in closer alignment with European standards for democratic elections, including OSCE commitments and Council of Europe standards.³⁹

The Media

The media operates in a pluralistic environment and enjoys freedom of expression.⁴⁰ State TV-1 complied with the legal provisions for the allocation of free airtime (two hours every day),

³⁹ International Observers Preliminary Statement on Elections, Civil.ge,
<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=6580&search=repeat%20parliamentary%20elections%202004>

⁴⁰ International Observers Preliminary Statement on Elections, Civil.ge,
<http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=6580&search=repeat%20parliamentary%20elections%202004>

although these spots were transmitted well outside prime time. However, the State television failed to provide a forum for political debates that are crucial in informing the electorate about political parties' platforms.

The transmission of political broadcasts by the "Our Adjara" movement during the pre-election campaign, making clear reference to the November events, raised questions regarding the impartiality of state television. This was all the more concerning since it was broadcast free of charge.

Outside the free airtime provided by State TV, media coverage was generally dominated by representatives of State institutions and the leading parties, while the opposition was largely ignored.

State TV provided extensive and overwhelmingly positive coverage of the current authorities, allocating 46% of total airtime to the President, and 20% to government officials. Together with the time devoted to the National Movement–Democrats (14%), the pro-governmental faction received 80% of the total airtime, illustrating a lack of balanced coverage of the campaign.

There was a similar scenario with private electronic media where limited time was devoted to opposition parties. Rustavi-2 devoted 38% of its news coverage to the President, about 19% to the government, and 14% to the National Movement–Democratic. On Imedi TV, their share was 30%, 22%, and 12%, respectively.

As in previous elections, Adjara TV continued to provide positive and exhaustive coverage of the Adjarian authorities and Revival, with largely negative coverage of the President and Georgian government officials. In addition, this station confirmed its bias during a stand-off

between the Georgian government and the Adjarian authorities, addressing the audience with alarmist propaganda.⁴¹

In general, the print media provided more balanced coverage than the television stations monitored by the IEOM. With few exceptions, criticism of the authorities, as well as of opposition parties, was present. The distribution of space among political forces was more balanced than on television.

The activity of some local media has reportedly been suffering from undue pressure and restrictions, often by local government officials. In Adjara, on several occasions journalists were obstructed from operating freely, and even intimidated and physically assaulted. As a result of the low-key campaign and the failure of most political parties to mount visible and effective campaigns, the media were

Media monitoring of snap presidential elections campaign - 2008

The Central Election Commission (CEC) released the results of its second media monitoring on December 29. Conducted by a contractor, Primetime, it covered the period between December 16 and December 22 and looked at four national stations – Rustavi 2, Imedi, Mze and the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) – and one Tbilisi-based station - Kavkasia TV. It involved both qualitative and quantitative distribution of airtime between the presidential candidates, including analysis of the distribution of free and paid political advertisement airtime. Imedi TV suspended broadcasts on December 26.

Mikheil Saakashvili still leads in terms of TV advertisements with a total of slightly over seven hours of paid airtime and three hours of free airtime. In the previous monitoring period (December 10-15) Saakashvili had a total of five hours and 40 minutes of paid airtime.

Other presidential candidates - Levan Gachechiladze, Davit Gamkrelidze and Shalva Natelashvili - mostly rely on free TV ads legally allotted for ‘qualified presidential candidates’ –

⁴¹ International Observers Preliminary Statement on Elections, Civil.ge, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=6580&search=repeat%20parliamentary%20elections%202004>

those nominated by political parties that won at least 4% of the vote in the last parliamentary elections and at least 3% of the vote in the last local elections.

Gamkrelidze, the leader of the New Rights Party, follows Saakashvili with five hours of ads. He had just ten minutes of paid airtime. Gachechiladze's next, with four hours and 36 minutes of free ads, and Natelashvili comes in last, with three hours and 40 minutes of free ads. Patarkatsishvili was not entitled to free ads, but had 18 minutes of paid airtime.

In quantitative terms, the research showed that the television stations dedicated the biggest share of airtime to Saakashvili; three hours in total.

Surprisingly, Irina Sarishvili, an underdog presidential candidate, follows with 2 hours and 15 minutes. The CEC explained that Sarishvili's appearance on two different political talk shows during the monitoring period resulted in her high standing. The CEC-commissioned media monitoring involves not only TV news programmes, but also TV political talk shows.

Gachechiladze and Gamkrelidze follow with an hour and 36 minutes and an hour and 14 minutes, respectively; with Natelashvili (1 hour and 14 minutes), Giorgi Maisashvili (42 minutes) and Patarkatsishvili (35 minutes) closing the chart. Natelashvili was the most frequently mentioned candidate during the previous monitoring period (December 10-15) with about two hours, followed by Saakashvili.

Rustavi 2 and Mze TV stations (both part of one media holding company) featured Saakashvili more frequently than any other television station. Imedi TV dedicated most of its airtime to Gachechiladze and Natelashvili, followed by Maisashvili, Saakashvili, Patarkatsishvili and Gamkrelidze. The GPB dedicated most of its airtime to Saakashvili, followed by Gamkrelidze and Gachechiladze.

In qualitative terms, according to the survey, Saakashvili was most frequently mentioned in a negative tone by Patarkatsidvili, however Saakashvili was mentioned in a positive side more often.

Meanwhile, in its interim report, the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission said that it

had observed a lack of balance in the primetime news coverage of presidential candidates on most monitored TV stations.

The report said that between December 7 and December 20, the GPB devoted 41% of its political and election news coverage to Saakashvili. 99% of this coverage was positive or neutral in tone, according to the interim report.

The next most covered candidate by the GPB, Gamkrelidze, received 17% of the coverage, followed by Gachechiladze with 16% and Natelashvili with 13%. The coverage of these candidates was also mostly positive and neutral in tone, according to the report.

The two nationwide private TV stations, Rustavi 2 and Mze adopted a similar approach to GPB's, devoting "the bulk of their news coverage to Mr. Saakashvili."

Imedi TV, owned by Patarkatsishvili, dedicated the highest share of its prime time political and election-related news coverage to Saakashvili - 34%.

"While some 45% of Mr. Saakashvili's coverage [by Imedi TV] was positive in tone, as much as 15% was negative," the report reads.

The next most covered candidates by Imedi TV were Gachechiladze and Patarkatsishvili with 18% and 17%, respectively. "The tone of their coverage was mainly neutral or positive," the report stated.

Parliamentary Elections, 21 May 2008

From 10 April to 20 May 2008, the OSCE/ODIHR EOM monitored five TV stations and four daily and weekly newspapers. Media monitoring included quantitative and qualitative analysis of the coverage, assessing both the amount of time and space allocated to each candidate and the tone of the coverage.

The media in general provided voters with a diverse range of political views, thus allowing them to make a more informed choice on election day. Public TV, in particular, 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, including one between the UNM and the United Opposition. Private broadcasters also organized talk shows with the participation of parties and blocs, giving them an opportunity to introduce their candidates. However, the campaign news coverage lacked balance on all monitored TV stations apart from public TV, with the UNM receiving the most coverage on almost all stations. Most monitored TV channels, including public TV, devoted significant and favourable coverage to activities of the authorities. For example, four main TV channels broadcast live a 22-minute prime time news item about a meeting of the President, cabinet ministers and regional officials in Kutaisi. Such substantial coverage went beyond the need and duty to inform the public about government activities. Appearances of the President, government ministers and local government representatives in the media coverage of ceremonial events such as openings of new bus lines, soccer fields, roads or factories, or in activities such as the distribution of vouchers, computers or other gifts, usually in the presence of UNM candidates, indirectly benefited the UNM campaign.

OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report said that *Rustavi 2* and *Mze* devoted extensive, favourable coverage to the incumbents. After lifting their boycott, both TV channels started to cover activities of the main opposition bloc in their news, but such coverage was much more limited than that of the authorities and the UNM.⁴² For example, *Mze* on weekdays broadcast a ten-minute local Tbilisi news program called “*Mzera Tbilisi*” (paid for by the Tbilisi municipal government), which during the monitoring period overwhelmingly featured the UNM candidates running in the Tbilisi single-mandate constituencies; other candidates running in these constituencies did not receive such coverage. Adjara TV adopted a similar approach. Local Tbilisi TV station *Kavkazia*, in contrast, served as a platform for the opposition, allocating the bulk of its coverage to the United Opposition and strongly criticizing the UNM and the authorities. The print media monitored by the OSCE/ODIHR EOM presented a diverse range of opinions.

⁴² OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report, 2008 Presidential Elections

Case

In the pre-election period the big attention was paid on the broadcasting media as several numbers of media monitoring activities were underway by local as well as foreign monitors. Television is considered to be the most influential source of news and information in Georgia. The Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB), comprising of three television and two radio channels, and private *Rustavi 2* and *Imedi* channels have nationwide coverage. These channels are widely perceived as supportive of the government. Two smaller channels, *Kavkazia* and *Maestro*, are regarded as pro-opposition; however, they cover only Tbilisi.

The European Union Delegation to Georgia and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) carried out a media monitoring in Georgia during pre elections campaign where they have studied the way Georgian TV channels covered local self government elections.

Six Georgian television companies were monitored in the pre-election period. The main news bulletins and talk shows on *Kavkazia*, *Georgian Public Broadcaster*, *Imedi*, *Maestro*, *Real TV* and *Rustavi 2*, were monitored by the Caucasus Research Resource Centre (CRRRC) at the request of the EU Delegation and UNDP.⁴³

The 6-week monitoring was conducted in May and June 2010. A group of civil society representatives, which included prominent Georgian media professionals, writers and researchers, discussed the results in a weekly television show aired by the *Georgian Public Broadcaster*.

The monitoring of election coverage was undertaken as part of a larger initiative, which aims to increase the independence and professionalism of the Georgian media and provide balanced and neutral information to the public. The project is implemented by the United

⁴³ **Media monitoring of the election campaign: May-June 2010,**
http://undp.org/ge/new/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=24&info_id=975

Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and costs EUR 500,000, being funded by the EU.⁴⁴

According to the final report of media monitoring, in overall the Georgian major TV channels allotted quite a long time to political parties and candidates. Compared with rest of the TV channels including public broadcaster, Kavkasia TV allotted 523 minutes which is the highest index, then comes GPB - 424 minutes, Maestro 402 minutes, Imedi – 383, Real TV – 301 and Rustavi 2 – 290 minutes.

Coverage of all candidates/ parties were all calculating in percentages in each TV channel. For my case, I have picked up four major candidates (Giorgi Ugulava (55.23 %), Irakli Alasania (19.05 %), Giorgi Chanturia (10.7 %), Giorgi Topadze (5.19 %) and Zviad Dzidziguri (8.31 %) who collected more than 5% in the Tbilisi Mayor's elections.

Coverage of candidates on GPB: Irakli Alasania 19%, Giorgi Chanturia 14%, Giorgi Ugulava 24%, Zviad Dzidziguri 15%, Giorgi Topadze 9%.

Coverage of candidates on Rustavi 2: Irakli Alasania 24%, Giorgi Chanturia 15%, Giorgi Ugulava 34%, Zviad Dzidziguri 13%, Giorgi Topadze 8%.

Coverage of candidates on Imedi: Irakli Alasania 15%, Giorgi Chanturia 12%, Giorgi Ugulava 44%, Zviad Dzidziguri 9%, Giorgi Topadze 5%.

Coverage of candidates on Kavkasia: Irakli Alasania 28%, Giorgi Chanturia 14%, Giorgi Ugulava 27%, Zviad Dzidziguri 14%, Giorgi Topadze 3%.

Coverage of candidates on Maestro: Irakli Alasania 25%, Giorgi Chanturia 12%, Giorgi Ugulava 31%, Zviad Dzidziguri 13%, Giorgi Topadze 3%.

Coverage of candidates on real TV: Irakli Alasania 23%, Giorgi Chanturia 9%, Giorgi Ugulava 38%, Zviad Dzidziguri 15%, Giorgi Topadze 2%.

⁴⁴ Media monitoring of the election campaign: May-June 2010, http://undp.org.ge/new/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=24&info_id=975

One of the important aspects of media monitoring was the tone of coverage on Georgian TV channels. It should be noted that the tone was more or less balanced and neutrality was leading.

Tone of coverage on GPB:

Irakli Alasania – 99% neutral, 1% negative.

Giorgi Chanturia – 99% neutral, 1% negative.

Gigi Ugulava – 8% positive, 85% neutral, 1% negative.

Zviad Dzidziguri – 95% neutral, 5% negative

Giorgi Topadze – 100% neutral

Tone of coverage on Rustavi 2:

Irakli Alasania – 84% neutral, 16% negative.

Giorgi Chanturia – 3% positive, 92% neutral, 5% negative.

Gigi Ugulava – 27% positive, 73% neutral.

Zviad Dzidziguri – 75% neutral, 25% negative

Giorgi Topadze – 100% neutral

Tone of coverage on Imedi:

Irakli Alasania – 88% neutral, 12% negative.

Giorgi Chanturia – 98% neutral, 1% negative.

Gigi Ugulava – 30% positive, 70% neutral.

Zviad Dzidziguri – 76% neutral, 24% negative

Giorgi Topadze – 94% neutral, 6% negative.

Tone of coverage on Kavkasia:

Irakli Alasania – 4% positive, 96% neutral.
Giorgi Chanturia – 100% neutral
Gigi Ugulava – 1% positive, 64% neutral, 35% negative
Zviad Dzidziguri – 100% neutral.
Giorgi Topadze – 100% neutral.

Tone of coverage on Maestro:

Irakli Alasania – 100% neutral
Giorgi Chanturia – 98% neutral, 2% negative
Gigi Ugulava – 74% neutral, 26% negative
Zviad Dzidziguri – 100% neutral.
Giorgi Topadze – 100% neutral.

Tone of coverage on Real TV:

Irakli Alasania – 42% neutral, 58% negative.
Giorgi Chanturia – 80% neutral, 20% negative
Gigi Ugulava – 24% positive, 76% neutral.
Zviad Dzidziguri – 52% neutral, 48% negative.
Giorgi Topadze – 82% neutral, 18% negative⁴⁵

From those results we can assume that generally media was balanced while covering elections campaign however there are some tendencies of privilege in regards of ruling National Movement candidate Ugulava on three major TV channels broadcasting in Georgia such as: GPB, Rustavi 2 and Imedi TV.

⁴⁵Monitoring Georgia's TV Channels,, http://www.civil.ge/files/files/CRRC%20MM_Charts_Wave%201-6_ENG.pdf

Ambassador Per Eklund, Head of the EU Delegation to Georgia, says that media monitoring is the way to strengthen social ties between the media and the public, and It promotes independent and professional reporting while encouraging citizens to make informed decisions.

“There is a tradition in Georgia that media outlets represent either the authorities or the opposition and I think they should not have these labels. The media should aim to report things in a balanced, correct manner, not please the authorities or the opposition. They should try to satisfy the legitimate need of the public to understand what is happening and the public should be able to trust what the media is saying. This is a matter of journalistic ethics and competence and about changing the culture in the country,” Ambassador Eklund said.

This is a process and it begun as we can see several positive trends, among which is GPB which significant for its editorial standards as well as journalistic ethics which is closing to European standards.

Comparing the standards of Georgian media with European one ambassador Eklund says that here in Georgia sometimes media has different understanding, some TV Channels are labeled as pro government or pro opposition which makes it difficult to understand media’s role. “Media should not become megaphone only for government or opposition but it should air balanced accurate account to public,” he said.

During his term Ambassador Eklund has watched several elections held in Georgia recently and comparing to previous elections environment he says, progress is obvious. According to him journalists are more motivated to cover the balanced information and protect their ethic standards, although this is not fully implemented, at least awareness of journalists have increased. Everyone plays its role, it is like foortabll game, you cannot have some members in the team playing another game, you have to follow the same rules. “GPB has a good beginning in this field and if it continues in that way this will have spillover effect on other TV channels like Rustavi 2, Imedi TV, kavkasia and etc.”⁴⁶

⁴⁶ This interview is recorded by Eter Tsojniashvili

Editor-in-Chief of *Rezonansi* newspaper and member of the media-monitoring group Lasha Tugushi says that the monitoring can be assessed positively because “We made a kind of diagnosis of the Georgian media, including gaps and positive elements.” He said that unlike in previous elections this media monitoring received very big support from the West, as the EU supported it and played a big role in creating an almost exact picture of what the media was doing during the election campaign. He said that the EU mission also did its best to ensure that debates were broadcast on GPB, though this was not pleasant for the Government.

Tugushi acknowledged that there are pro-Government and not pro-Government TV channels in Georgia but said he does not agree that the latter are significantly pro-opposition, because the monitoring stated that so-called pro-opposition TV channels allotted quite a lot of time to the ruling party and its candidate. He said that being pro-opposition means habitually looking at things from an opposition point of view, and the obvious stations such as Kavkasia and Maestro are not doing this.⁴⁷

Media expert Ia Antadze also hails GPB for its ‘more or less’ balanced coverage of the elections, however she says that during news programmes this balance was not always observed, citing the day, when the ruling National Movement presented Gigi Ugulava as its Mayoral candidate, when GPB, Imedi and Rustavi 2 reported this news in a similar way, with a 23 minute news item aired during each bulletin as its top story.⁴⁸

The analyst Gia Nodia⁴⁹ says that none of the Georgian TV channels have a balanced information policy, however the most frequent criticism made is of partiality to the Government. The three major TV companies which broadcast throughout Georgia are frequently attacked for such bias but the press is in a rather different condition and considered to be more opposition than Government in orientation. However, as newspapers have less influence than TV channels the Government shows an overall ‘profit’ in the media field. Nodia

⁴⁷ This interview is recorded by Eter Tsojniashvili

⁴⁸ This interview is recorded by Eter Tsojniashvili

⁴⁹ This interview is recorded by Eter Tsojniashvili

sees another problem in the public's unwillingness and lack of demand for balanced information. "It seems people prefer to have their 'own' media sources which are in compliance with their political views. I do not think everything would be OK if Maestro or Kavkasia could broadcast throughout Georgia from tomorrow," he says.

Despite the problems of TV channels' balance Nodia says that GPB is a good example for other stations in terms of having more or less balanced news. "At least it tries," he says. But he adds that in some particular cases it is significant that the station management is more in favour of the Government than the opposition "and as it seems the authorities have sufficient levers to influence their policy."

Commenting on media coverage of the local elections Nodia says that each political party or candidate had an opportunity to present their opinions and plans to the voters. Government candidates had certain advantages, however it should be noticed that in Tbilisi the ruling party candidate did not have a big advantage as Tbilisi viewers could choose between pro-Government and pro-opposition channels.

One thing which is obvious is that TV channels really tried to be more balanced and objective than in previous years. They knew that their news coverage would come under strict media monitoring. Nodia thinks that the democratic West really has influence on the Georgian media and on the country's democracy in general as the Government does take into account its demands. However despite the fact that the West finances plenty of projects on media environment improvement in Georgia these are not very effective because the media itself does not show enough desire to uphold professional standards of journalism.

In 2010 The U.S. Government's supported for 18 local NGOs to support civil society and media participation of May 30 local elections. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) provided USD 450,000 through its Election and Civil Society Project for projects designed to underscore the importance of the role of media and civil society in helping to guarantee free and fair elections.

One of the projects covered media monitoring, candidate debates, election observation and monitoring of use of state resources in the election campaign.

The goal of the grant program was to support improved media coverage of candidate debates and other pre-election activities to ensure broad public participation.

In the frameworks of this project Magazine Liberali ⁵⁰ carried out media monitoring from April 5 to May 28, 2010. Five TV Channels Rustavi 2, Imedi TV, Kavkasia, Maestro and GPB were selected for monitoring.

The research says that from 1532 news program aired during that period 39.5% was dedicated to the elections. Three TV channels Kavkasia, Maestro and GPB mostly put an accent on elections theme.

Coverage of elections issues had different dynamics, for instance the major theme of the April were voters list and nominating joint candidate of opposition.

In overall 37.5% was dedicated to Tbilisi Mayors elections. News programs mainly were covering according to the activity of political parties and candidates in compliance with their agenda setting.

Ruling United National Movement has appeared in media a bit later after beginning of the pre elections campaign and occupied quite a significant time of news programs. TV stories on Giorgi Ugulava appeared at the end of April and following that time stories about Alasania and Ugulava were almost equal, although to sum up 2 months Alasania's activity is more than Ugulava.

As for pro opposition TV channels, Maestro covered Ugulava more than Kavkasia, although Kavkasia allotted its time for Alasania. ⁵¹

Another media monitoring research was carried out by the Ukrainian media monitoring company, Pro.mova which was invited by the Central Elections Commission (CEC). Pro.mova said that Gigi Ugulava had been allotted the most time by *Rustavi 2*, *Imedi* and *GPB*, ahead

⁵⁰ Final Results of Media Monitoring, <http://www.liberali.ge/node/1958>

⁵¹ Final results of Media Monitoring, Magazine Liberali, <http://www.liberali.ge/node/1958>

of Irakli Alasania from the Alliance for Georgia. Alasania was given the most time on Kavkasia, followed by Ugulava. On Maestro Ugulava and Alasania were given equal time.

Along with three Georgian companies (Prime Time, BCG and IPM), Ukraine's leading monitoring company, Pro.mova coordinated media monitoring for the elections on May 30, 2010. Georgian companies are working on quantitative and basic qualitative monitoring. The Ukrainian company prepared a final report of detailed qualitative and summary quantitative monitoring results. The reports of all the companies involved will be made available to any interested party.

The monitoring methodology was based on recommendations from international experts and meets international standards. The research was carried out at all news, talk-shows, paid-for and free political advertisements broadcast on the central broadcasting channels Rustavi2, Imedi, Kavkasia, Maestro, GPB, Second Channel and Adjara.

In addition, it is interesting what kind of attitude did voters have towards the candidates and political parties. Broadcasters using people's voice in their news items to create certain political contexts: one of the examples can be made a story on Imedi TV, which was about the primary several people were asked in the street and none of them supported identifying the unified oppositional candidate through sociological survey. So, the reporter highlighted that it has become practically impossible to find a person who would be certain in the effectiveness of a primary. In a few days, it turned out that "difficult to find" about 12,000 people took part in the survey about primary and part of them attended the announcement of results in the Chess Palace.

The story on Maestro TV about the problems people demand the new mayor to solve was not balanced. Employment, improvement of municipal services, solving social problems - the reporter referred to the results of the research held by the International Republican Institute. People asked in the street kept unanimously naming solution of the problem of unemployment. The reporter pointed out that those who named other problems first, spoke about the necessity of employment in the end.

"Much more has to be done," Gigi Ugulava, whose candidacy has not been raised for mayoral race yet, repeats the pre-election message of the National Movement. The story about the elevator rehabilitation project starts with the story of a 78-year-old woman who, due to the restored elevator, put a step on the ground after a 9-year pause. "It's a miracle that we have such an elevator," pensioner man of the same building pointed out. And the city mayor was giving interview to the TV reporter surrounded by people, on the background of shouts "Bless you, son!"⁵²

People's voice on "Imedi" was much more aggressive in the story depicting Zurab Noghaideli's visit to Adjara: "What did Noghaideli do for Adjara?" "Putin's puppet ! Do I look like a doll to be pushed and brought to the action?!" - voices were heard from people.

Often in stories where politicians appear among people, no people's voice can be heard. No one asked for opinion those people, for example, who gathered at the "Tbiliselebi" publishing house or people in front of the parliament protesting against illegal imprisonments, or people attending the announcement of primary results; especially that during the presentation of those results Zviad Dzidziguri referred to the 80-percent support and said that regulating relations with Russia was their demand. Author of none of the stories who covered the meeting came up with the idea to ask people on the presentation and find out what they really thought

⁵² Rusudan Rukhadze, pre-election voice, Pre-election voice, Magazine Liberali, <http://liberali.ge/node/1998>

Theory

The study employs theoretical perspectives derived from the theories of Framing and Agenda-setting.

Framing Theory

There a number of definitions of framing offered by scholars, including problem definitions, causal interpretations, moral evaluations and treatment recommendations and key themes, phrases and words. The constructionist approach to framing argues that “framing incorporates a wider range of factors than priming and agenda setting, which are both cognitive concepts,” and that “frames are tied in with culture as a macro societal structure.”

Despite the large number of differing definitions, framing is essentially the process of selecting and organising information in order to produce stories.⁵³ Among the most commonly used definitions are Entman’s: “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described and Reese’s: “Framing refers to the way events and issues are organised and made sense of, especially by the media, media professionals and their audiences”.

According to Reese, the mass media is able to frame issues and so direct public debate, and “Public deliberation, therefore, is not a harmonious process but an ideological contest and political struggle. Actors in the public arena struggle over the right to define and shape issues, as well as the discourse surrounding these issues. Sometimes, actors struggle mightily to keep important issues off the public agenda”.⁵⁴ As the modern mass media is able to highlight particular issues and present stories in a certain light it has a significant role in political and

⁵³ Theory Into Practice: Framing, the News Media, and Collective Action . Charlotte Ryan, 1991

⁵⁴ Framing as a strategic action in public deliberation, Z Pan, GM Kosicki, 2001

public debate as well as, social movement. “Frames invite us to think about social phenomena in a certain way, often by appealing to basic psychological biases. Studies have examined, for example, the effects of information that emphasises positive or negative aspects, the individual or the collective, and the episodic or the thematic”⁵⁵

It is almost inconceivable for news making to occur without framing as framing is an integral feature of the news-making process. Journalists define and research the information which best fits their organising ideas. For example, when analysing issues it is often assumed their definition is obvious. Sometimes it can be useful to group a set of concerns and give it a name, for example, the “drug issue,” however framing reminds us that the way issues are defined can itself be problematic.

Framing is particularly important to this study. Using framing theory will enable us to see which characteristics of the event studied were the most emphasised, how the media reported the subsequent social and political instability and what agenda the media presented to the public during the event.

Agenda-setting theory is considered as the basis for framing theory, which in turn is also referred to as the second level of agenda setting⁵⁶. The first dimension, agenda setting itself, is transmitting issue salience from the media to the public. The second dimension is the media’s role in framing these issues in the public mind.

To date there have been no studies on the influence of the media’s agenda on public agenda in societies such as Georgia. Since the memory of the communist media during Soviet times is still fresh, the media has low credibility. Georgia is still a society of oral culture in which informal, personal sources have the highest credibility, therefore it is unclear whether the media sets public agenda or how it participates in the public agenda-setting process.

⁵⁵ Framing public life: Perspectives on media and our understanding of the social world, Reese, 2001

⁵⁶The Agenda-Setting Role of Mass Communication, Maxwell McCombs Tamara Bell, 1996

Agenda-setting theory is important to this research in a tangential sense; this study will not determine whether the media influenced the public agenda in this particular case as since this event occurred in 2001, too much time has passed to conduct a survey to compare the media agenda with the public's agenda. However numerous studies of agenda-setting have indicated that the media has this ability, so it is important to know what agenda the media communicated in the likelihood that the media in Georgia is also performing an agenda-setting function. Additional research should be carried out to see whether the agenda the media set in other events was adopted by the public.

History and Orientation

The function of agenda-setting refers to the media's ability to raise the importance of an issue in the public mind. As far back as 1922, the newspaper columnist Walter Lippman was concerned that the media had the power to present images to the public. In his book *Public Opinion* (1922), he proposed that the mass media influenced the images we create of the world, which are often inaccurate and incomplete. In 1968, during the US Presidential elections, McCombs and Shaw conducted the first empirical test of Lippmann's theory. Chapel Hill, N.C was deemed suitable for determining the effects of the media since it had a large number of undecided voters. The study sought to find a correlation between the importance of issues in public opinion and media content. The results showed a strong relationship between the public's and the media's agenda indicating the media's ability to influence public opinion. Following further studies in 1972 and 1976 they concluded that the mass media exerted a significant influence on what voters considered to be the major issues in electoral campaigns.

Agenda-setting describes the very powerful influence exerted by the media in shaping our ideas about what issues are important. There are two basic assumptions in most research on agenda-setting: (1) the press and the media do not reflect reality, they filter and shape it; (2) the media's concentration on relatively few issues leads the public to perceive those as more important than others. Noteworthy aspects of the agenda-setting role of mass communication are its time frame and the different agenda-setting potential of various media forms. It is

clearly fitting to use agenda-setting theory to help us understand the pervasive role of the media (for example in political communication systems).

Our argument in this paper is based on two ideas. The first is that election campaigns can and often do influence voting behaviour and electoral outcomes; the second is that election campaigns typically focus on a small set of issues.

Framing and Agenda Setting Theory

Tankard, Hendrickson, Silberman, Bliss, and Ghanem⁵⁷ described a media frame as “the central organising idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration.” McCombs has suggested that in the language of the second level of agenda-setting, “framing is the selection of a restricted number of thematically related attributes for inclusion on the media agenda when a particular object is discussed.” He argues that there are several other agendas of attributes besides the issues and traits of political candidates and a good theoretical map is therefore needed to bring order to the vastly different kinds of frames discussed in various studies.

There is no universal agreement among scholars that second-level agenda-setting is equivalent to framing, at least not to more abstract, or macro-level, framing. Gamson⁵⁸ explains framing in terms of a “signature matrix” that includes various condensing symbols (exemplars, catchphrases, metaphors, depictions, visual images, taglines), and reasoning devices (cause and effect, appeals to principles or moral claims). Some would argue that second-level agenda setting is more like the first part of this matrix than the second, because

⁵⁷ The convergence of agenda setting and framing, Tankard, Hendrickson, Silberman, Bliss, and Ghanem (1991)

⁵⁸ Framing as a theory of media effects, Gamson (1992)

it is easier to think of condensing symbols as attributes of a given object but more difficult to think of reasoning devices as attributes (Weaver, McCombs, & Shaw, 2004).

Priming and agenda setting

Several scholars have become interested in the consequences of the media's agenda setting on public opinion and government policy. This focus on the effects of agenda setting for public opinion (sometimes called priming), can be traced back at least as far as Weaver, McCombs, and Spellman.⁵⁹ In their study, they speculated on the effects of Watergate news coverage that the media may suggest which issues to use in evaluating political actors. They did not however use the term priming to describe this process.

Over a decade later, in 1987, their speculation was supported when Iyengar and Kinder (1987), in controlled field experiments, linked television agenda-setting effects to evaluations of the U.S. President in a demonstration of what some psychologists have called priming – giving certain issues or attributes more prominence and more likely to be used in forming opinions. In 1991, even after taking into account various demographic and media-use factors, Weaver found that increased concern over the federal budget deficit was linked to increased knowledge of the possible causes and solutions of this problem, stronger and more polarised opinions, and a greater likelihood of engaging in some form of political behaviour over the issue.

Willnat argues⁶⁰ that the theoretical explanations for these correlations, in particular those between agenda setting and behaviour, have not been well developed, but the alliance of priming and agenda setting has strengthened the theoretical base of agenda-setting effects

⁵⁹ David H. Weaver, Maxwell E. McCombs, and Charles Spellman "Watergate and the Media: A Case Study of Agenda-Setting".

⁶⁰ Agenda setting and priming: Conceptual links and differences, Lars Willnat

by providing “a better understanding of how the mass media not only tell us ‘what to think about’ but also ‘what to think’ ”

Scheufele maintains⁶¹ that the theoretical premises of agenda setting and framing are different. He argues that agenda setting (and priming) rely on the theory of attitude accessibility, by increasing the salience of issues and thus the ease with which they can be retrieved from memory when making political judgments, whereas framing is based on prospect theory, which assumes that subtle changes in the description of a situation cause interpretive schemas in the potential voter that influence the interpretation of information rather than making certain aspects of the issue more important.

While second-level agenda setting and framing might not be identical processes, similarities do exist. Both are more concerned with how issues or entities (people, groups, organisations, countries, etc.) are depicted in the media than with which issues or entities are more or less prominently reported. They both also focus on the most salient or prominent aspects, or themes or descriptions, of the entities of interest.

Both are concerned with ways of thinking rather than objects of thinking. But framing does seem to include a broader range of cognitive processes than second-level agenda setting – for example causal reasoning, appeals to principles, moral evaluations, and recommendations for treatment of problems.

It seems likely that agenda setting and priming are based on more similar cognitive processes, as Scheufele suggests, because both are salience based, although agenda setting seems to be more than just a matter of accessibility .

To sum up, while there are similarities and connections between agenda setting, priming, and framing, they are not identical approaches. It is interesting that while, over the past decade framing studies have far outnumbered both agenda setting and priming studies, framing seems to be the least well defined of the three – conceptually and operationally. Future

⁶¹ Framing, agenda setting, and priming: The evolution of three media effects models, Scheufele(2000)

studies should concentrate on defining frames and framing more clearly, clarify the similarities and differences, and explore the relationships between framing and agenda setting, and between framing and priming.

Elections

The roles of issues and campaigns in elections are a recurrently discussed in political science literature. Traditional democratic theory holds that campaigns inform citizens, offer them clear and distinct choices between candidates on the issues and motivate them to participate in elections. It is understood that voters assimilate the information they receive from campaigns and cast their ballots accordingly for the candidate who most directly addressed their concerns.⁶² Early empirical research on campaigns and elections, however, demonstrated that voters' sociological characteristics and partisan attachments were usually more important than issues, as well as campaigns and other short-term forces in influencing how people vote.

Issue Voting

Political scientists have debated the conditions necessary for issue voting⁶³ and whether it is prospective or retrospective. In general, experts agree that for issue voting to occur voters must have access to the positions held on various issues by each candidate, be able to distinguish between them, and compare the candidates' positions to their own beliefs and priorities. Early consensus in this discipline concluded that voters generally could not meet these criteria. Firstly, ambiguous policy positions can actually make a candidate more appealing to voters. Secondly, voters are remarkably uninformed about issues. Finally, few individuals have a consistent set of personal beliefs against which they can judge candidates' positions. However voters apparently believe that issues should be a factor in their voting decision mechanism. Voters dislike being uncertain of candidates' issues (Bartels 1988).

⁶² Agenda setting in congressional elections: The impact of issues and campaigns on voting behavior, OG Abbe, J Goodliffe, PS Herrnson

⁶³ Reciprocal Effects of Policy Preferences, Party Loyalties and the Vote, Benjamin I. Page, Calvin C. Jones. <http://www.jstor.org/pss/1953990>

Nevertheless, this preference for issue clarity does not result in all voters being able to recall the major issues on which Congressional elections were fought.

Two categories of theories link issues and voting behaviour. Spatial theories dictate that candidates adopt positions on issues that appeal to the median voter⁶⁴. Empirical research demonstrates voters' preferences vary by issue, making it tricky for a candidate to choose the equilibrium position.⁶⁵ Partisan characteristics of a district, such as the number of partisans and the degree of polarisation, can give candidates incentives to have diverging platforms, converging platforms or ambiguous platforms. According to retrospective voting theories voters look at previous policy decisions to predict the candidates' and parties' future actions, making each election a referendum on the candidate's performance and forcing the candidates to emphasise their successes and their opponent's failures.

Agenda Setting Theory in Elections

Agenda setting theory gives issues a more prominent role in influencing voting decisions and provides a useful framework for analysing elections. Campaign news coverage⁶⁶ and advertising can influence the significance⁶⁷ of issues and national events in citizens' calculations. Candidates use their campaigns to try to set the election agenda, thus influencing the issues by which they are judged. Campaign activities have both direct and indirect effects on voters; advertising influences voters' issue preferences and candidate evaluations. Campaign events also generate news coverage, which also influences voters. Candidates can pursue at least two different advertising strategies to set the election agenda

⁶⁴ Downs 1957; Black 1958; Davis, Hinich, and Ordeshook 1970; Calvert 1985

⁶⁵ Candidate equilibrium and the behavioral model of the vote, RS Erikson, DW Romero, <http://www.jstor.org/pss/1963255>

⁶⁶ COMMUNICATION AND OPINION, Donald R. Kinder

⁶⁷ Effects of political advertising, Atkin et al. 1973; McClure and Patterson 1974; Rothschild and Ray 1974; Atkin and Heald 1976. <http://www.jstor.org/pss/2748206>

⁶⁸Using an "issue ownership" strategy, candidates try to increase the salience of issues in which their party has displayed a competent record. In a "riding the wave" strategy, candidates coordinate their advertising with those issues covered in the news. Ansolabehere and Iyengar's experimental research proposes that only the issue ownership strategy is effective at winning votes. When candidates focus their campaign on issues that favour their party, they have a bigger positive impact on voters than the news.

Unlike party-owned issues, election agendas vary routinely, as they are continually influenced by the media, local conditions, and candidates' campaign activities. Petrocik hypothesises that electorate will vote for candidates whose party appears the most competent to deal with the issues dominating the election. Candidates use their campaigns to emphasise problems and solutions on issues their party "owns". When an election focuses on issues that favour the opposing party candidates try to divert the agenda to parts of these issues that favour their party. For example, in US elections, when the election agenda focuses on an increase in crime rates, which favours the Republicans, Democrats attribute the problem to failures of the educational system, aiming to make the election a referendum on an issue their party owns. Petrocik shows that voters in the 1980 US Presidential election recognised differences in the parties' abilities to deal with specific issues. Candidates emphasised issues that their party owned, and voters, especially weaker partisans, voted for the party whose reputation was the strongest on the issues they were most concerned about. Aggregate-level analysis supports the issue ownership theory in Congressional elections. When challengers run on issues that are traditionally associated with their party, they win approximately three percent more votes than those candidates who run on the opposing party's issues. ⁶⁹

We theorise that voters are more likely to vote for candidates who campaign on party-owned issues that are important to the voter. We also assume that the effect of issues is greater for

⁶⁸ Does attack advertising demobilize the electorate?, Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994.

⁶⁹ Agenda setting in congressional elections: The impact of issues and campaigns on voting behavior, Herrnson 2000: 232-34

independent voters than for party followers. Clearly undecided voters should be more responsive to issues because they do not use party affiliation as a voting cue.

There is strong evidence that partisan voters care about issues that are favourably associated with their party. When it came to voting decisions, majorities of partisan voters identified issues owned by their party as those that were most important. Voters were also more likely to share issue priorities with candidates who campaigned on issues owned by the candidate's party. These findings suggest that party leaders and individual candidates must campaign on a well-defined agenda for party-owned issues to have an impact. Study results suggest that had the Republicans followed this strategy in 1998 they would not have lost seats. Finally, it is believed that independents are more responsive to shared issue priorities than party identifiers. The impact of agreement with the Democratic candidate on a Democratic-owned issue was two to three times greater for independent voters than for partisan voters. Overall, these findings demonstrate that campaigning on party-owned issues is an effective strategy for setting the election agenda. Candidates who campaign on issues traditionally associated with their party lead voters to focus on those issues and use them to cast their ballots. The level to which a candidate is able to set the agenda affects the level of support received from party identifiers. Campaigning on party-owned issues also helps candidates win the support of independent voters, whose vote can often be the difference between success and defeat in close races. Candidates who succeed in dominating the issue agenda have a definite advantage in elections.

The role of the press is to focus attention on a few public issues in addition to other aspects of public affairs. This agenda setting role is the involuntary result of the necessity for the news media and their limited capacity to select issues to be addressed each day. 'Agenda' is strictly a descriptive term for a prioritised list of the major subjects found in newspapers, television news programmes and other mass media messages, or those that the public and policy makers view as important.

Shanto Iyengar and Donald Kinder demonstrated these priming effects in a series of experiments that compared two groups, one group saw no television news stories on a particular issue during the week, while the other watched television news stories on that issue. Among those exposed to major news coverage on one or more of five different issues

– defence, inflation, arms control, civil rights, and unemployment—their ratings of Presidential performance on these issues influenced their overall opinion about the President's performance far more than among those for whom these issues were not particularly salient. In effect, the press set the agenda of issues that citizens drew upon in making their overall judgments of Presidential performance. This is a powerful extension of the press's role in the formation of public opinion.

Attribute agenda setting involves a third consequence of agenda-setting effects – the link between the prominence of particular attributes possessed by an object and opinions about that object. Obviously, the images in people's minds, which include both substantive attributes and the affective tone of these attributes, are related to their opinions. If the press sets the public agenda, who sets the press' agenda? The pattern of news coverage that defines the press agenda results from the traditions of journalism – daily interactions among news organisations, and the continuous interactions of news organisations with various sources and their agendas, especially policymakers in Government.

Traditions and routines of journalism are at the centre of the layers of influence on the press agenda and the press itself is the final authority on what constitutes the press agenda – which events and topics will be reported and how they will be presented. Journalists' penchants for conflict, negative news and political maneuvering are well documented. The result is a public affairs agenda often far removed from the reality of a situation and practically never a fully representative picture of the public arena.⁷⁰

Journalists habitually look around to check their sense of news by watching the work of their colleagues, especially of those at elite organisations such as the *Washington Post* in the US, *The Times* in the UK, and respected television networks such as the BBC. The previously mentioned 1968 Chapel Hill study, which included elite newspapers in addition to local newspapers and news magazines, found a high degree of homogeneity among the agendas of all nine news media studied. This homogeneity is not limited to election years. The *New York Times* frequently functions as an agenda-setter for other members of the press, both print and electronic, especially in initiating new topics on the news agenda.

⁷⁰ The Press, Geneva Overholser, Kathleen Hall Jamieson

External sources of the press agenda include public officials, ranging from the President of the United States to local officeholders and administrators, a huge network of public relations activities and, especially during elections, political-campaign organisations. These standard sources of news for journalists have far more sway than ordinary citizens and grassroots community organisations in deciding which issues the press talks about and how it talks about them. To publish a newspaper or broadcast a news programme every day requires an organised system, and such systems tend to centre on key government officials and institutions as their major sources of news. In turn, these sources frequently have public information operations such as Public Relations departments and Press officers to facilitate media coverage of their activities. While these sources will not fully determine the press agenda, they can have considerable influence on what is reported and how it is covered.

Elections are a unique case, and during Presidential elections political campaigns enjoy considerable success in setting the press agenda during the early stages. Depending on the length of the campaign, this influence may diminish as the campaign moves toward Election Day and garners greater attention from journalists. On the other hand, in local elections, where there are fewer journalistic resources, the candidates' influence on the press agenda is less varying and tends to be stronger. The greater independence of the press in national elections may, in part, be due to the influence that sectors of the news media have on each other. In turn, this homogeneity of press coverage sometimes exerts an agenda-setting influence on the messages of the candidates.

In general public relations activities in both the public and the private sector influence the press agenda. Over a twenty-year period, Leon Sigal found that nearly half of the front-page stories in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* were based on press releases, press conferences, or other information subsidies provided by organised public relations efforts. However, reiterating the point made previously, the press is the final decision-maker of what is on the press agenda, selecting from the stream of agendas presented by officials, political actors, and others those topics regard most newsworthy.⁷¹

⁷¹ ⁷¹ The Press, Geneva Overholser, Kathleen Hall Jamieson

Public Judgment

The media greatly influences public opinion and the formation of public policy. To a large degree, the press agenda leads the attention of the public and policymakers to specific issues and situations and to particular aspects and points about those situations. On the positive side this is a factor in creating consensus in society. However, this contribution can be negative. Although the press agenda is not immune to influence from real-world situations or news sources, including policymakers, in much of the world the press enjoys considerable freedom in the construction of its agenda, a freedom that sometimes results in images that are poorly related to reality.

Fortunately, the public itself and policy makers (or at least major portions of those groups) operate as a safeguard on the agenda-setting influence of the press. In particular, in a democracy, it is the public that are the ultimate source of authority in deciding the relevance of the objects and features on the press agenda. This leads to a final question about how much the press agenda contributes (and could contribute more) to the process of deliberation through which society sets its goals and the way to achieve them..

Journalists should be less concerned about status and their own fame, and news organisations should be cautious of the risks of "brand building" through a thirst for journalism awards. In the 1970s an award mentality swept through the journalism profession resulting in newspapers paying more attention to the overall look, length and format of their reports than how the information would be received by their readers. The objective became the prize rather than the journalism. Journalists should be independent – thus they should end their involvement with press clubs and follies with Government and business officials whom they are employed to cover, and eliminate correspondents' association dinners, and activities that encourage socialising with the very people they should be covering. Journalists should stop accepting speakers' fees, sometimes in the thousands of dollars, from organisations and institutions that they should be covering. Reporters should not be allowed to vote on awards given to the people they cover, whether this be in sports, entertainment or anything other

field. It is obvious that press junkets compromise journalistic integrity and should be discouraged.⁷²

Finally, journalists must report on themselves. At most newspapers the media reporters, at best, generally produce average work. They don't think about visiting other newsrooms and they don't write about their own newspapers. Stories in many areas should mention the relevance to the newspaper, magazine, or broadcast station: stories about downtown development (for example, Times Square in New York, where the New York Times may benefit from particular projects), about use of immigrant labour, about the lack of coverage of the Federal Communications Commission proposal to loosen ownership rules. This responsibility is for all newsroom editors, not only media reporters. Despite their introduction in the 1980s, news organisation ombudsmen have not produced many good results. Many are hired because editors believe they will be team players. Many take on this duty after long careers at the organisations in which they are given an ombudsman role. Sydney Schanberg, one of the USA's most distinguished reporters and writers, approached top news organisations about a position as a media writer who would give journalism the same scrutiny that journalism is supposed to give other areas of American life. For three years, he was unsuccessful in securing such a role.

Explaining media's role in voters decision-making process during the elections through Agenda Setting Theory

Following the explanation of concept of Agenda Setting Theory, now we can assume that it is in compliance with decision-making process of voters before putting their ballots into the election boxes. Agenda Setting Theory explains how the media sector influences on society's opinion formation which is due to the several factors including media coverage of certain political parties or candidates.

⁷² ⁷² The Press, Geneva Overholser, Kathleen Hall Jamieson

The fact that none of the opposition parties could receive any significant number of votes in the regions of Georgia could be caused by not appropriate and well balanced news programmes in the regions as only three major TV Channels (considered to be state controlled) are broadcasted there.

The fact that you have information only from one side and each news programme starts with ruling party elections campaign and its candidates speeches while meeting with population, this influences on voters and made them to think that government does its best but "much more has to be done."

Conclusion

Despite a number of serious challenges the Georgian media is developing in a positive way and coverage of recent elections is one good example of this. But problems remain and it is up to government and media representatives to try improving the gaps this sector faces. What is for sure is that media independence is protected by the law and this should not be violated as society needs objective, balanced information which will help them to realize the existing situation in the country including its progress or failures.

Several recommendations can be given to government of Georgia, parliament, civil society and media.

To the government/ parliament of Georgia:

- Amend the Law on Broadcasting which will legally guarantee the transparency of the media owners, at the legal entity level as well as the individual level; specifically it should be stated explicitly in the Law on Broadcasting that the media owner company should not be registered in any of the off-shore zones.
- Amend legislation, particularly the Law on Broadcasting to avoid mediation (direct or indirect, through a third party, etc.) of the media services;

To the media:

- Develop a model for a solid and active professional union;
- Create effective mechanisms of self-regulation and maintain professional standards;
- Provide professional standards and focus on regularly raising the level of professional skills and professional improvement;
- Initiate legal procedures, especially when freedom of speech is violated and the fulfillment of professional duties is hindered.

To the European Union:

- Emphasize the need of editorial independence of national TV companies as the main priority in media policies while negotiating with the Government of Georgia;
- Continue to promote independent media outlets and individual projects so that they can continue to function until a healthy market economy is developed through funding, through facilitating training and educational programs, through programs of resident consultants.
- Support conducting quarterly content and financial monitoring of the Georgian media by funding programs and competitions aiming at quantitative and qualitative analysis of Georgian media
- Facilitate the strengthening of independent professional associations aimed at strengthening freedom of media and promoting professional standards of journalists.

As former editor-in-chief of Time **Henry Anatole Grunwald said** “Journalism can never be silent: that is its greatest virtue and its greatest fault. It must speak, and speak immediately, while the echoes of wonder, the claims of triumph and the signs of horror are still in the air.”

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