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**The Factors Affecting the Formation of Regional
Television of Georgia and Typology of Programmes**

A B S T R A C T

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General Overview of the Research

The actuality of the research

The creation of independent regional TV companies in Georgia is a new stage of the development of TV broadcasting. This is quite natural as it is directly linked to the process of democratization in the country during the post-Soviet period. The state structure lost its monopolistic status and actual pluralism of broadcasting occurred – rigid and vertical Soviet broadcasting system collapsed and various telecommunications on horizontal axis came to existence. The process is in harmony with the tendencies of liberalisation of information highways taking place in democratic states of the world, free transmission of information and massive creation of non-governmental informational structures.

Apart from the fact that regional private sector media, in comparison with common-national media, seems to be more open according to liberal norms and considerably broadens the scope of publicity, it possesses more potential to appeal to and affect its audience. This includes highlighting common issues through the local prism, as well as dealing with specific problems, which is impossible in case of central broadcasting channels. Increasing demand of the audience to acquire local information and relatively larger trust towards local independent media were the main factors that determined the formation of regional broadcasting. However, there were other social and political factors at play. The necessity to study the newly-created sector within the Georgian broadcasting determines the actuality of the research.

The aims and the objectives of the research

The aim of our research is to perceive those factors which determined the formation of regional broadcasting in Georgia and still largely affect its operation; the study of typological peculiarities of regional TV programmes; to analyse of positive as well as negative aspects of a regional broadcasting practice; to identify existing problems and determine perspective directions for prospective development.

The research samples comprises of currently existing three dozens of regional TV companies and their operation during the last decade, 2001-2010 will be studied. However, in some specific cases we refer to the processes which had occurred before the period under the study. This is necessary as they refer to initiation and development of regional TV broadcasting in Georgia.

Under the concept “regional TV broadcasting” we include all the TV companies outside the capital city, whose transmission covers one city or district (however, their coverage might include neighbouring districts and in some cases, the whole region and can represent itself as

a regional broadcaster). Their vast majority is private, independent structures – the only exception is Adjara Television, which represents a state department of autonomous entity. However, our research still includes this particular TV company as a typical district-regional broadcaster.

The study background of the research issue

The development of regional broadcasting in Georgia is a rather complicated process, which already encompasses two decades but still has not come under a scientific scrutiny yet. The only research which can be linked to the present study is D. Gachechiladze's research (*The Development of Independent TV Broadcasting in Georgia*) which he conducted to obtain a scientific degree of the candidate of philological sciences. However, the study only concentrated on commercial TV companies operating in the capital city. A more valuable, specific set of information can be obtained from the research by the Institute of Peace, Democracy and Development conducted in 2003-2004, whose aim was to study the media in the regions of Georgia. The research was carried out through the project "Regional Media Development in Georgia and Public Liability". This research created the basis for "Regional Media Map of Georgia" issued in 2005. Similar importance can be assigned to the internal research of the Association of Regional Broadcasting conducted in 2010 aiming at determining general tendencies for broadcasting media development in regions. This initiative was a part of the project "Strengthening the Role of Media as a Controlling Institution in Georgia". The project was carried out by Eurasian Fund of Cooperation with the assistance of European Union and the Government of Norway. Both project are directly linked to the present research and provides valuable data necessary to perceive the processes during the last five years.

Scientific novelty of the research

The dissertation is the first attempt to view the creation and development of independent regional TV broadcasting through the modern prism. This is a complex process and is linked with many political, social, technical, administrative and creative problems. The questions to be asked here are: What are the main factors for the formation of regional TV media? How much is it affected by a general democratisation process of the country and what is its own role in these processes? What are the roles of regional TV broadcasting companies in common system of national broadcasting as well as in the local structure of regional media? What are the specifics of initial stages of their development? What are the programme structures of the principles of their formation? What are the forms of partnership with central channels? What experience have regional TV companies inherited from traditional broadcasting and what innovations are they trying to introduce? What are positive and

negative tendencies observed in their operation and what are the perspectives of their development? These are the questions the research seeks answers to and they determined the scientific novelty of the present study.

In terms of methodology, the research was conducted in three directions: 1. The analysis of the documents related to establishing and operating of regional TV companies; 2. The analysis of questionnaires filled in by the owners, directors and employees of TV companies; 3. The study of broadcasting structure and media-products of TV companies through the analysis of their archive as well as direct observation of their broadcasting.

The practical value of the present work

First and foremost the research will help the people employed in regional broadcasting companies to better realise positive and negative aspects of their operations, to tackle existing drawbacks and pursue appropriate course of actions. To this end the research provides specific recommendations. The study will also be of much support to the students of faculties of journalism at higher educational establishments of Georgia in order to study the course “Modern Media of Georgia”. This is very important as it is impossible to analyse current status of the Georgian journalism without taking into consideration regional media. Finally, as the first research in regional TV media, it can provide historical data to the forthcoming researches in the field.

The Research Structure

The research consists of the introduction, six chapters and a conclusion, appendices and a reference list. Wholly 140 pages.

The introduction explains the actuality of the research, outlines the issues under the study, evaluates the existing literature reflecting the topic, sets research aims and objectives, main directions and methods.

Chapter I – “Initiation and the formation of regional telecommunication” refers to the process of formation of regional TV companies.

The appearance of regional TV companies in Georgia, except two cases, dates back to 90s of the previous century. Their number today reaches three dozens and covers almost all regions of the country. Exceptions are regions of Rach-Lechkhumi and Svaneti where there are no electronic media-structures developed till today. We should note here that some of the TV companies have been transformed into cable channels or closed throughout the last 20 years. These TV companies vary from each other to a great extent and the difference is determined by many factors – the level of economy in the region, geographical specificities, scale, cultural potential, etc. Other nonetheless important factors are the company geographical coverage, broadcasting time, the structure and duration of their own programmes. Many of these companies were initially formed as cable channel or private cooperative, which were occupied with electrical installation and only late were transformed into broadcasting organisation. The majority of these TV companies cannot cover the whole region (and do not intend to do so). Mostly they manage to broadcast in one or several districts within the region. The Adjara TV is the only broadcasting company which broadcasts not only from the centre of the region, which is Batumi, but broadcasts from the capital city as well. Thus it is not only regional but nation-side broadcasting company.

As for broadcasting time, regional TV companies broadcast either 24 hours, or broadcasting time may vary from 7 to 19 hours. The rest of broadcasting time is filled in by the programmes of TV companies of the capital city. Average broadcasting time of regional TV-media itself is 2-3 hours and include news, analytical, cognitive and entertainment programmes, commercials, congratulations, obituaries, etc. As for the form of ownership, the majority of regional TV companies are in private ownership (Ltd's, though initially some of them were joint-stock companies). They are members of “the Association of Regional Broadcasting Companies of Georgia”, which, according to the latest data, includes 26 members (see appendix 1). Sometimes the local government is co-owner of the company.

The interests of the founders of TV companies vary as well. They can have their own personal ambitions, a wish to lead business, more scarcely – public enthusiasm or professional objectives. Television is an effective means to reach success in any field. For example, one of the founders of TV company “Odishi” became a member of parliament. Later on, another founder became the governor of the region. One of the owners of TV company “Trialeti” was an activist of governmental party “Unified National Movement” and a member of parliament.

It is a paradox that among the founders of regional TV companies there are no journalists. The only exception is TV company “Argo” in Zestafoni. In 1995 a group of local district press journalists came to a conclusion that it might be profitable to embark on Telecommunication business. That was the first precedent in regional broadcasting of Georgia when professional journalists and efficient people in the field were simply broadening the scope of their field of activities. While TV companies were founded by a single family or a group of friends, in this case the unification of founders was determined by their profession.

As it seems, the involvement of family members and friends in television business determines the fact that professional journalists are often ignored while preparing TV programmes. Throughout decades in all regions of Georgia there operated printed media and highly qualified journalists were formed. The faculty of journalism at Tbilisi Ivane Javakishvili State University prepares and educates journalists for 60 years. It is hard to believe that none of them managed to develop awareness of the specificity of telecommunication in order to place themselves in regional TV-journalism. Only two TV companies are exceptions.

Some broadcasting companies provide radio as well as TV-broadcasting and show the tendency to form a kind of media-union. However, it should be noted here, this type of unification of TV and radio broadcasting has not much developed in the regions of Georgia (Regional independent radio stations seem to be more successful in this respect).

Chapter II – “The Specifics of the Forms and Programmes of Regional TV broadcasting” covers two directions in regional TV broadcasting in Georgia: firstly, the TV companies, which fill up their broadcasting time by licensed and unlicensed films, entertainment programmes, music clips and other types of video products; minor programmes prepared by these companies can be added to the list (in most cases news programmes, programmes for children, talkshows, commercials, obituaries and congratulations). This type of companies are “Rioni” (Kutaisi), “Odishi” (Zugdidi), “Gurjaani TV”, “Marneuli TV”, “Channel 5” (Bolnisi), “Mega TV” (Khoni), “Zari” (Samtredia) and of course, “Adjara TV”. If we do not include the latter, which is a state structure and is funded from the state budget with 6 million Lari per year, all these “independent” TV companies operate in extremely hard conditions. There is either no commercial market in the district, or is very limited. The

sources of programmes are equally limited (there is no market for TV products) and the existence of the company depends on the owner's financial status, or the finances from accidental sponsors or advertisements, obituaries and congratulations. There is also a threat of facing the local authorities in terms of defending their own rights. But for the support from foreign donors and non-governmental organisations, the "independence" of these TV stations would greatly suffer.

To keep the independence, at least partially, and the necessity to provide the broadcasting with necessary programmes, the regional TV companies sought partnership with central Channels which would be popular among the Georgian audience and could fight back up its position in relation with the government. Thus the second direction of regional TV broadcasting came to existence – regional TV companies allocated their part of their broadcasting time to certain central channels and included their own programmes (2-3 hours duration) within the programme of the central channels. This might remind us of the practice of national networks established in the USA, where NBC, CBS and ABC have hundreds of partners in different districts of the country. This form of broadcasting in Georgia did not exist. However, it is hard to say that national TV networks have been formed in Georgia, because legal or financial liabilities and responsibilities of this kind of interaction have not been clarified and established yet.

The most popular partner for regional TV companies is "Rustavi 2", which has been successful in effective geographic expansion. It broadcast on the whole territory of Georgia and has more than 3 million viewers. Apart from "Rustavi 2" the partners of regional TV companies are other Tbilisi-based companies: "Region TV", "Imedi", "Public Broadcaster" and cable channel "Maestro".

Their intentions are based on the aspiration to cooperate with central channels and they sought to solve the existing problems by common effort, distribute advertising funds and fill up programme broadcasting time. The central channels showed interest in attracting more advertisements through geographic expansion.

The means of mass-media show tendency for unification and formation of structures of different nature. Independent regional TV companies could not avoid this process either. In September 1995, in Likani, at the seminar "Creative Media Management" the authorities of five independent TV stations from different cities of Georgia decided to allocate some broadcasting time to common programmes and founded an organisation through which the acquisition of licensed programmes for these stations would be carried out. The organisation was named "Television Network of Georgia (TNG)". It can be said that this was the Georgian broadcaster's first attempt for unification, first precedent of a national association. Ultimately,

16 Television companies were unified which were broadcasting in different locations of Georgia (Tbilisi, Rustavi, Kutaisi, Batumi, Osurgeti, Lanchkhuti, Zugdidi, Chkhorotsku, Samtredia, Zestafoni, Tkibuli, Gori, Kareli, Akhaltsikhe, Telavi).

Since May 1996 TNG, along with the US non-governmental organisation “Internews Network”, launched informative analytical programme “Kvira” (Week). In August the fund operating at the embassy of the USA funded further development of the programme. Since March 1998 “Television Network of Georgia” broadcast another weekly analytical programme from “Internews” – “The Crossroad” (in Russian). This programme highlighted the life of the three Transcaucasian countries and aimed at the population of these countries. “TNG” operated for several years and ended when the funding was stopped.

The integration of commercial companies is a natural process, which should ultimately have resulted in the formation of nationwide organizational structure of independent TV broadcasters. In 1990s similar type of association was created in Russia. As for the UK, the Headquarters of Independent Broadcasting (ITV) has long been operating. The foreign experience was taken into consideration when in 2005 with the support of “Internews” “The Association of Regional Broadcasters of Georgia” was founded. It is non-entrepreneurial membership organisation which unites 24 broadcasting companies from different regions of Georgia. At the initial stage the association was technically and financially supported by “Internews” and “Irex”. Currently the support of similar nature is provided by the Dutch organisation “Press News”, fund “Open Society - Georgia” and USA Embassy in Georgia. Through the project supported by them the association covers basic administrative expenses and prepares a weekly programme “Polygonal”. This programme is prepared through participation of other companies and is broadcast by each of them on their air.

In terms of institutional development the association is supported since 2010 by “the Fund of Eurasian Development”, a successor of “the Fund of Eurasia”, which is a non-profit organization established in 1992 in order to support the development of the society in former Soviet States. The evaluation conducted in this respect showed that, in spite of some drawbacks, is a real actor and can provide substantial support to their members, protect their private, as well as common interest of the Georgian media. The same year the needs of the member companies of the association were studied and the research yielded the following results: scarcity of technical and financial resources of regional broadcasting, monotonous programmes, and low financial and technical readiness of the companies to shift to digital broadcasting.

Through the support of “The Fund of Eurasia Cooperation” the association established links with “The Association of Regional Broadcasters of Europe (CIRCOM)” which provides

the association with consultation on how to acquire membership. At the same time the association appeals to other international unions, such as “UNICEF”, “Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR)”, “The Association of Regional Media”, etc.

This type of links seem to be of special importance, because in Georgia (except the performance of “Rustavi 2” prior to the Revolution) central broadcasting companies show little interest in the performance of regional TV companies, do not use their resources to highlight local events, and of course, do not provide them with time on their air. Such attitude can be explained by two reasons: 1) Vast majority of central TV companies show loyal attitude towards the government and do not like the programmes prepared by local broadcasting companies because the latter often criticize the structures of local governments; 2) The justification which are provided by central broadcasting companies – low technical quality of regional programmes which is largely determined by the fact that they have to use out-of-date technology. How else can be explained the fact that even “Public Broadcasting Company of Georgia”, whose function is to highlight the life in regions, do not provide regional companies with air time for the common programme “Polygonal”? This programme would, on the one hand, enrich the programme structure of “Channel I” and increase the number of its viewers, and on the other hand, it would provide regional broadcasting companies with stimulus.

Regional TV companies try to develop partnership relations and links. A good example of this is “The Association for Development Media in Samtskhe-Javakheti” established in 2001, “which unifies regional TV companies from Shida Kartli and Samtskhe Javakheti: “Borjomi TV”, “Dia” (Khashuri), “Channel 9” (Akhaltzikhe), “ATV 12” (Akhalkalaki), and “Farvana” (Ninotsminda). Through financial support from IREX the association developed a project “Parallel” which intended to exchange information among partner companies and prepare common programme. This type of programme, which is also named “Parallel” is on air twice a week.

The second partner union is operating in Samtskhe-Javakheti. The company functioning in Akhaltsikhe belongs to Ltd “Imperia” which is privately owned. It has a license to broadcast in Akhaltsikhe, Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda. These companies prepare talkshows together – “Dialogue” and “Free Microphone” which is aired by the three companies.

One of the primary factors which determined the formation and development of regional media, namely telecommunication in Georgia was the support from foreign donor organisations. Mostly it was IREX (International Research and Exchange Board – international non-profit organization, which aims at deepening knowledge in former Soviet states in order to enable individuals as well as establishments to fully participate in the

formation of Civil Society); “Fund Open Society – Georgia” – a member organisation of “Opens Society Institute Network”, which was founded in New York in 1994 (its function is to support the formation of open, democratic state, civil sector and media development); “Internews - Georgia” – a local, non-profit organisation of “Internews Network” which operates in Georgia since 1997 and tries to improve the access to information through strengthening independent media and stimulating open communication policy contributing to the society. It attracted more than 30 contractors: the representation of European Union in Georgia, OSCE mission in Georgia, USA Embassy in Georgia, UK Embassy in Georgia and many others, whose annual financial support exceeded half million dollars. With hard social circumstances and corruption prevailing in Georgia at that time, free media would have had very little chances for development if not all these organisations and individual funds which enabled independent media to think about progress and how to refine their operations.

The support of donor organisations towards regional TV companies was carried out in several directions. 1) Grants for technical renovation and development; 2) Grants to carry out certain media projects; 3) Teachings and trainings to develop professional cadre and raise qualification (translating and publishing special literature in Georgian as well). In addition to all these, advocating was also promoted – donor organisations supporting regional TV companies against repression from the government and active promotion of their rights.

Grants issued for technical renovation was directly related to improving broadcasting structure and refining broadcasting policy which was particularly vivid during pre-election period. For example, in 1999 TV company “Odishi” got a grant from “Fund of Eurasian Cooperation” to purchase necessary equipment to ensure broadcasting of debates during presidential elections. Similarly, in 1999 the same “Fund of Eurasian Cooperation” provided “Borjomi TV” with financial and technical support to implement information and analytical programme. With the help of this grant the company broadcast election debates on air. During the period of elections of local self-governing bodies in 2001 the grant from “Fund of Eurasian Cooperation” was acquired by TV company “IX Wave” to purchase equipment necessary for direct transmission. In 1999 “XII Channel” (Bolnisi) organised pre-election debates with the help of equipment acquired through the grant from “Internews”. Similarly, “Kolkheti 89” provides direct transmission with the support of “Internews”.

As for the support provided to regional TV companies in order to realised particular media projects, donor organisations show vested interest in analytical and critical programmes, debates on air and organising talkshows, as well as programmes in the language of ethnic minorities reflecting their problems.

The role of donor organisations is particularly great in teaching and training the cadre of regional TV companies and raising the qualification of the personnel.

“Internews” provided seminars and trainings where many journalists from “Trialeti”, “Borjomi TV”, “Channel 5”, “Guria”, “Kolkheti 89”, “Wave 9”, “Farvana” and other companies raised their qualification in news release, journalistic investigation, debates on air and preparation of talkshows, commercials and management, principles and methods of forming regional TV programmes (IREX also was active in this respect).

The processes discussed above determine regional telecommunication conception and typology of programmes. How many channels can be accepted by the regional viewers and has the regional channel properly identified its place in the broadcasting space? What are the sources of programmes upon which regional TV companies rely? Does the regional channel possess its own broadcasting time or is it a branch of some central channel? What is the share of day-time broadcasting of the programmes (daily or even weekly) prepared by regional TV stations? These are the questions which present themselves while analysing regional TV programmes.

Through the observation of Telecommunication map of Georgia we can see that main central channels (“Public Broadcaster”, “Rustavi2”, “Imedi”) cover all the regions of Georgia (Public Broadcaster broadcasts through line switching and the rest – through satellites) and regional companies are related to them. It does not make difference whether the programme block is switched into the air of central channels or is transmitted independently, the volume of regional TV programmes vary from 15-30 minutes to 2-3 hours (not exceeding this time volume). The only difference is that the rest of broadcasting time of “branch” companies is occupied by a partner channel. As for the independent companies, whose daily broadcasting time varies from 18 to 24 hours, try to fill up their air by the production from outer sources – license or unlicensed films and soap operas, music or other video production (during recent time the Association of Regional Broadcasters of Georgia provide active support in this respect). In such a case, except their own programmes, regional broadcasting companies provide cultural and recreational programmes.

As for the programmes prepared by regional TV companies, in term of typology they are almost the same – they broadcast local daily news and provide the analysis of weekly events, social and political programmes (talkshows and debates, documentaries, more scarcely journalistic investigations), religious and cognitive programmes, entertainment programmes and programmes for children, commercials, congratulations and obituaries.

It should be noted here that only a few TV channels possess stable broadcasting time (see appendix 2,3); in all other regional companies only news programmes are more or less stable.

If we take into consideration the address, programmes for children occupy a special place among regional TV programmes. There is no wide variety in terms of genres – verbal and video information, interviews, and more scarcely reporting. It can probably be understood if we take into consideration that the variety and quality of TV programmes is directly related to financial and technical basis of a certain TV channel.

Chapter 3 – “News Programmes on Regional TV Channels” is dedicated to the characterising news programmes of regional TV companies.

All the regional broadcasting companies of Georgia broadcast news (basically of local nature), but the quality of their information services vary from each other to a great extent. Limited amount of TV companies daily broadcast news (e.g. “Trialeti”, “Rioni”, “Adjara”, “TV Channel 25”, “Gurjaani TV”, “Borjomi TV”, etc.). Some TV companies broadcast news several times a day, however, others manage it 3-4 times a week and even re-broadcast one and the same programme (see appendix 4). There have been occasions when due to the lack of funds some daily programmes have been transformed into weekly ones. Vivid are the names of news programmes themselves: “News” (“Dusheti”, “Imervisia”, “Jikha”), Daily Events (“Rioni”), “Today” (“Gurjaani”), “Daily Chronicles” (“Borjomi”), “Chronicles” (“TV-Radio Company of Kvemo Kartli”, “Lagodekhi TV”), „Herald” (“Odishi”, “Adjara”), “Droeba” (Chronicles) (“Zari”), “Echo” (“Channel 9”), “Spectrum” (“Argo”), “Facts” (“Guria”), “Cursor” (“Wave 9”), etc.

News occupy permanent allocation on all leading TV companies. These standards are met to a certain degree by news programme of “Trialeti”, which provides viewers with news programme “Reflection”. Today “Reflection” is broadcast 5 times from Monday to Saturday: 12.30, 15.30, 18.30, 22.00, 24.00 and 18.30, 22.00 and 24.00 on Sunday. The programme lasts 20-30 minutes. “Collage” is transmitted at 22.00 which summarises all main events of the day. Due to the fact that the news programmes went on air after “Messenger” prepared by “Rustavi 2”, their starting time was determined by the duration of “Messenger”.

Events are briefly highlighted in the programme: what happened, where and when, and what was the reaction, be it political events or events of other nature. News programmes are led by a woman narrator. If something important takes place, there might be direct transmission from the site. However, this is very rarely carried out due to technical issues. It cannot be said either that “Reflection” is rich in term of genres. Basically interviews and informative remarks are used.

From among news programmes prepared by “Rioni” (Kutaisi) attracts special attention. The programme is much richer in the number and type of information, as well as in a number of transmissions.

Currently news programme “Daily Events” prepared by “Rioni” is broadcast daily five times a day: 14.30, 16.30, 18.30, 20.30, 00.00. The first and the last programme last 15 minutes, the three others – 30 minutes. “Daily Events” is not broadcast on Sunday. It is substituted by informative-analytical programme which summarises the whole week.

On the basis of news agency of TV company “Rioni” it can be said that it was basically controlled by the local government and its owner acted accordingly. The government often limits means of information. Not only topics and subjects are selected based on its instructions and directions, but unfavourable programmes are closed down and the company arranges shifts within the cadre. After “Rose Revolution” with the coming of the new government nothing has been changed in the field of telecommunication – only faces have been changed; as for objectives, principles and the tone of broadcasting, they remain the same.

“The Department of TV and Radio of Adjara” has efficient information agency. It is not surprising, because from the very beginning the telecommunication of Adjara was intended to be autonomous structure covering the whole region.

Local information is the priority for news agency of Adjara Television which is followed by the national news and only foreign events are highlighted only at the end of the programme. All news programmes follow this pattern and is only changed when something very important occurs in the capital city or outside, as was the case in April 2003 which faced political tension. However, actually the cases of deviation from this principle are quite frequent when local news is not assigned primary importance.

News programme “Time” is broadcast 7 times a day. The first issue which digests the main events is on at 8.30 am. The time for the last issue is 22.30. The main programme is on at 20.30. The duration of each issue may vary depending on the period of the day and may be 10, 15, 20, 30 minutes. News programme “Novosti” (News) which is in Russian, is transmitted daily except Saturday and Sunday at 19.00.

As for the principles of acquisition and digestion of information, according to the standards of the Georgian television, the programmes prepared by Adjara Television are satisfactory. However, the lack of individualism is readily observable and these characteristics can apply to the Georgian TV and Radio journalism in general.

Many regional channels manage to prepare both daily news programmes and informational-analytical programme summarizing the whole week. This form of programmes was initiated by the state television in the Georgian broadcasting space (the programme

“Msgefsi”). Later on this type of programme was further developed by “Rustavi 2” (firstly, the programme “Week”, later on, “P.S. Courier”), which became an example for regional TV companies. This is particularly true of TV programme “Week”.

We do not refer to 15-minute news releases which are broadcast once a week due to lack of finances (e.g. “Bolnisi V and XII”, “Borjomi”, “Wave 9” (Poti), and other news programmes) and do not match this structure. However, 30-60 minute programmes provide viewers with facts and events as well as their analysis (see appendix 5).

From 2000 till September 2001 TV company “Rioni” based in Kutaisi broadcast an official weekly chronicle “the Herald” along with daily news programmes.

In September 2002 the editorial office of “The Herald” was dismissed and instead of it there was launched summarizing analytical programme “The End of Week”. It was an authorial programme and was prepared by a small team of professionals consisting of two journalists, two camera men, two editors and one director. The aim of this team was to inform the audience, adequately reflect the reality and providing impartial and objective comments. The rating of the programme was ever-increasing. However, in spite of the objective nature of the programme, which was predetermined by its independence, it could not avoid a conflict with the government. The conflict was triggered by the news broadcast about a visit to Kutaisi of a member of the parliament, Boris Kakubava. Naturally, the news included his comments concerning current events. The authority of the company received critic from the governor of Imereti region in relation with the comments made by the oppositionist. The critic was so strict that the authority of the company had to change the format and content of the programme and “The End of Week”, like news programme, began to serve the interests of local authority.

After “Rose Revolution” the programme “The End of Week” was replaced by information-analytical programme “7 Days”. It is transmitted every Sunday for 55-60 at 19:00 and is re-transmitted on Monday at 11.15. The programme highlights main facts and events which occurred throughout the week in Imereti Region as well as in whole West Georgia. That is why this programme is broadcast not only by TV company “Rioni”, but “Imervisia” (Chiatura) and “Odishi” (Zugdidi) which do not have their own weekly information-analytical programmes.

Chapter IV – “The Structure of Regional TV companies” represents a typological analysis of the products from regional TV studios and discusses main trends and directions in broadcasting.

Georgia has had twenty years of hardest period in its history. The change of the government several times, civil war, the Russian intervention and the occupation of a

significant part of the Georgian territory by Russia, internal political tension and economic problems create numerous difficulties for the Georgian mass media and regional telecommunication. The situation is further exacerbated by demographic and migration problems, social, ecological issues, and the criminal. This well explains the fact that regional broadcasting is politicized which results in the increased number of programmes reflecting social and political issues. Along with news programmes, social-political broadcasting by regional channels is carried out through numerous interactive talk-shows.

It is not accidental that majority of grants provided by foreign donor organisations to regional telecommunications were intended to implement direct talk-shows. This type of talk-shows was assigned special importance after “Rose Revolution” when central channels eliminated socio-political talk-shows not only from air but in the recorded form as well. Regional TV companies assumed the responsibility “to save” the genre.

Almost all regional TV companies either had or still have talk-show type programme with the duration of 45-60 minutes; some of them even have a few of this type of programme.

The most common title for talk-shows is “Dialogue” which underlines the necessity to disclose different viewpoints and worldview. This type of “dialogue” talk-shows are provided by “Gurjaani TV”, “TV Channel 25”, “Channel 9”, “Satellite”, “Imervisia”, “ATV 12”. “Dialogue” is the title for talk-shows prepared by “Lagodekhi TV” and “Bolneli” (Channel 12); there is “Political Dialogue” (“Argo”) and “Dialogue with the Government” (“Wave 9”).

Some talk-shows are referred to as “Forum” (“Borjomi TV”, “Mega TV”); what is meant here is that it is a representation of people. Generally, TV channel speaks on behalf of people providing their opinion and their need for freedom of expression: “What People Think” (“Trialeti”, “Kolkheti 89”), “Along with You” (“Guria”), “My Time” (“Mega TV”), “Public Opinion” (“Argo”), “Independent Microphone” (“Borjomi TV”), “Platform for Freedom of Expression” (“Farvana”), etc.

The second trend whose development in regional telecommunication was a keen interest of foreign donor organisations was **investigation journalism**. In every region local governments showed aggressive disposition towards local media and television because of their controlling function. In every region there were tabooed topics and media were prohibited to publicly discuss them. Such topics were illegal income which local governing clans got through different sources and shared it with higher authorities (cases like, illegal privatisation, illegal export of natural resources, having a share in local business, abuse of state resources, etc.). Any journalistic investigation was followed by a sharp response by the government and that’s why this genre of journalism has not been implemented in regional telecommunication. There can be only few examples.

Foreign donor organisations are also interested in highlighting the issues of minority on independent regional TV channels and that's why it is more frequently financed. Georgian is multinational and multicultural country and there are two topics identified. Media owned and controlled by the state usually avoid topics concerning ethnic and religious topics and these groups waste their trust towards the state and are alienated. This mistrust can be neutralized by a balanced broadcasting policy of regional television.

Ethnic minorities are mainly represented in two regions of Georgia – Qvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti where Azeri and Armenian communities reside. However Azeri and Armenian people, Osetians, Greek, Abkhazians, Chechen people also live in other regions of Georgia. As researches show there are different types of demands towards regional media – in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Qvemo Kartli regions most part of local media is broadcast in native language of local population. That's why there is a demand to balance the information and provide high quality production. Ethnic minorities of other regions have problems because of lack of broadcasting in their native tongue. As for religious minorities, especially those who do not belong to traditional confessions, their problems and interests are not reflected in regional media (Georgia's regional ... 2005:12).

The interests of ethnic minorities should be dealt with and TV company “Channel 9” (Akhaltzikhe) is a good example of this. Once the programme touching upon historic issues was prepared which irritated local Armenian population (who comprise 40 per cent of local population). They perceived this programme as a threat and the company authority was forced to cancel the programme.

However, this does not mean that “Channel 9” was aggressive toward non-Georgian population of the region. As a member of “the Association for the Development of Media in Samtskhe-Javakheti” participated in the preparation of the programme “Parallel” which was transmitted twice a week for 20-25 minutes on “Channel 9” and “Borjomi TV” in Georgian and in Armenian on “ATV 12” (Akhalkalaki) and “Farvana” (Ninotsminda). This Georgian-Armenian analytical programme was funded through IREX. Since 2006 talk-show “Thema” (topic) was broadcast on “Channel 9” and was translated into Armenian.

Currently, along with sub-licensors “Channel 9” prepares two talk-shows – “Dialogue” and “Independent Microphone”. TV company pays attention to religious groups as well – Orthodox, Catholic and Gregorian confessions.

TV channels transmitting in Armenia also try to support Georgian-Armenian integration. Apart from the fact that they broadcast programmes prepared in cooperation with Georgian TV channels, Akhalkalaki TV company “ATV 12” broadcast translated news

programmes from “Rustavi 2” and “Public Television”. “ATV 12” also transmits Tbilisi Russian Channel “Region TV”.

Ethnic and religious factors are important issues which similar to Samtskhe-Javakheti region affect functioning of regional television in Qvemo Kartli. From ethnic-religious point of view the region is quite diverse. It is inhabited by Azeri, Orthodox and Muslim Georgians, Gregorian Armenians and Orthodox Greeks.

In spite of the fact that majority of the population in Qvemo-Kartli region is Azeri, “TV and Radio Company of Qvemo Kartli” (which has a license for Rustavi, Bolnisi and Marneuli) does not broadcast on Azeri. This can partly be explained by the fact that TV company cannot cover Marneuli, Gardabani, Dmanisi, Tsalkisi and Bolnisi where Azeri population resides. That’s why through the grants provided by the USA Embassy in Georgia transmits local news through Marneuli television. Besides, “Marneuli TV” which is broadcast in Georgian, translates news or provides subtitles in Azeri language.

TV company “Bolneli” (Channel 12) takes into consideration the interests of the Azeri audience. Through the support of the fund “Open Society – Georgia” it adapts local news into the Azeri language – at 19:00 on Sundays there is a programme “Digest” – news in Azeri for 30 minutes (the programme is shown again on the same day at 22:00).

These are the issues of ethics and the protection of human rights. The integration of ethnically or religious diverse population into common national system of the country carries vital state importance. Group of people who lack attention because of their diversity is alienated from the society. As a result disintegrating processes occur in the society which can be fatal for the multinational country such as Georgia.

Among the programmes designated for ethnic minorities there is one which is worth mentioning – “Novosti”, news in the Russian language which is on air every day except weekend at 19:00 and the duration is 10 minutes (The programme with the same name was prepared by TV company “Rioni” when it began to operate).

It is important that TV company “Trialeti” broadcasts a 15-minute news in the Osetian language which is prepared by the “Public Television”. “Public Television” shows this programme from Wednesday through Saturday at 6.30 and probably has less audience. It should also be taken into consideration that “Trialeti” broadcast right from the centre of Shida Kartli, Gori, and covers Tskhinvali region as well. Besides there are many ethnic Osetians living in Shida Kartli and many villages have Osetian population.

Like “Trialeti” TV company “Odishi” broadcasts news programme in Abkhazian language prepared by “Public Broadcaster”. “Channel 1” also transmits this programme early in the morning. It is broadcast from the town of Zugdidi and covers a big part of Abkhazia.

Thus, both regional TV channels are trying to provide valid information to the population on the territory occupied by Russia.

TV company “Mega TV” (Khoni) in comparison with other regional TV channels pays a relatively more attention to the issues of minorities and allocates broadcasting time to various social groups and citizens. Frequent have been the programmes about religious and ethnic minorities residing in Khoni region. For example, the TV covered the event of opening a Catholic Church in Akhalsheni; Catholic holidays are regularly highlighted; there have been several programmes prepared on the problems of Iehova witnesses in Kutaisi and Samtredia; there was a programme about Meskhetian-Turks living in the village of Ianeti in Samtredia region. This kind of programmes are valuable, as specialists consider, „Highlighting different people should not be carried out not only for the purpose of keeping equilibrium and meeting equality issues. It is important for mass media in terms of business success. By presenting the opinion of a single group the representative of mass media limits a potential hearer or a listener. They will increase the audience if they try to cover the interest of diverse groups” (highlighting the diversity... 2004:22).

The study of regional TV programmes shows that **religious topics** are typical for many of them. It is enough to say that more than half of regional TV companies provide religious programmes. This may be preconditioned by the fact that in atheist Soviet state every type of religious propaganda was banned (especially through mass media). Nowadays there is religious revival and more people choose to be religious. Besides, this type of programmes increase awareness.

It should be noted, though, that all religious programmes by regional telecommunications in Georgia cover only Orthodox Christianity. The only exception is Akhalkalaki TV company “ATV 12” broadcasting in Armenian, which highlights Gregorian confession due to its audience and prepares the programme “Khoran Luso”.

Other cognitive programmes on regional TV channels are of cultural-educational nature and cover history, literature and theatre, judicial and medical consultation. This trend in broadcasting includes morning programmes – informative-cognitive and cognitive-entertainment programmes, which involve education, informative and entertainment functions.

The majority of organisational structures of regional TV companies provide **programmes for children** and some companies even have studios for children and teenagers (“Trialeti”, “Gurjaani TV”, “Rioni”). As for the programmes themselves, children participate in the preparation of these programmes on regional TV channels. This is preconditioned by the fact that based on the Georgian mentality, parents are interested to give their children the

chance to appear on TV and that's why they themselves provide funding for these programmes. Sometimes this policy is officially announced. TV company "Gurjaani" collects monthly payments from the parents of those children who are the members of children's studios.

There are three major trends in broadcasting programmes for children on regional telecommunication – programmes for children, programmes showing the children's works and programmes for teenagers which basically of cognitive-entertainment nature.

In the operation of regional TV companies recreational function assumes the major role. This is partly predetermined by the fact that major part of these companies were initially formed as cable channels and their main function was to entertain the audience. The broadcasting time was filled up by unlicensed films, music clips and sports programmes. This is still a tradition as along with information and political programmes, much time is allotted to recreational programmes.

Finally, along with all topics or programmes, one of the major parts of regional telecommunication is commercials, local advertisements, congratulations and obituaries, which are more or less presented in the programme of all companies and is a regular source of income. The income may vary from channel to channel – in some cases the portion of commercials is bigger and in other cases the price for the commercials can be higher. Main source of income for the TV company "Trialeti" nowadays is advertisements, obituaries and congratulations; with the company "Dia" it is advertisement as the volume of commercials is low; similarly, TV company "Dusheti" completely relies on advertisements, obituaries and congratulations; a major source of income for the companies "Satellite", "Egrisi" and "Jikha" is advertisements; according to approximate calculations, advertisements make 70% of income for "Channel 25", 60% for "Argo" and "Kolkheti 89" and 50% for "Odishi"; On the other hand, advertisements make 80% of the income for the TV company "Wave 9", 50% for "Gurjaani TV" and "Imervisia", 40% for "Marneuli TV" and 30% for "Bolneli".

To sum up, it can be said that the income obtained from commercials and advertisements, congratulations and obituaries is not sufficient and if there were not grant programmes and other sources of funding (sponsors, funds from local governments, etc.) the majority of regional TV companies would cease functioning.

Chapter 5 – "Regional Television and the Government" refers to one of the major issues in media operation – the relationship with the governing structure. In the case of this research it is self-government.

Under the circumstances of current relationships, neither before "Rose Revolution" not after it can regional media confront the government. Quite the opposite, the tendency of

getting closer to the government has been intensified – newspapers and TV companies themselves ask for patronage from the government. For example, in Kvemo Kartli, Bolnisi TV company “Channel 5” inspired the initiative to make the company a state organisation. From the perspective of funds it is easily understandable – there is not a social and economic context for the existence of independent media, the state patronage is associated with constant income.

The deficit of financial resources, which is first and foremost caused by weak market for commercials and lack of sponsors (if foreign donor organisations are not considered in this case), puts part of regional TV companies in the situation when they have to compromise and be loyal to local governing bodies in order to gain financial support. On its side, local political elite has observed the advantages of local media to exert its influence over the society. Thus, there is binary approach of the government towards media – it support and funds the companies loyal to the government and limits and puts repressions on the “rebels”.

Television is the fastest and the most effective way of interaction with the population and the government wants to use its advantage in return for certain amount of funding. This policy is carried out in all democratic states.

Almost half of independent regional TV companies in Georgia are partly funded by local government and regional governing bodies use this opportunity to disseminate their information. Major income for these TV companies is the contact with local authorities.

However, as the experience shows, cooperation between TV companies and local governing bodies is not always acceptable. Very often it is shaped as the deal between the two sides (especially in case of full funding) and often results in complete obedience of the company to the government. A vivid example of this is the operation of TV company “Rioni” in a pre-revolution period.

In 1997 the information service of “Rioni” began to prepare interactive programme – “The City Mayor is Ready to Listen”. The mayor of Kutaisi Temur Shashiashvili was appointed as a governor of Imereti region and the programme was substituted with “State Representative of President is Ready to Listen”. In both cases, Temur Shashiashvili assumed the role of an expert to highlight weekly events.

Time after time the programme underwent changes. First of all, concluding part of the programme, where the population of Kutaisi could actually phone the governor and ask questions, was removed from the programme. State structures were the only provider of information for the TV company. The editorial board of the programme agreed all upcoming programmes with the press office of the State Representative and very soon this press office became the only source of information. It resulted in the situation when the programme

carried out state ambitions and interests of a single person. Eventually, monopolization of regional television became the aim of the local government. The television was assigned a function to obey one person who used it as an instrument to govern and control the society.

The metamorphosis of TV company “Rioni” is not surprising – its operation mostly depended on a positive disposition from the government and gradually it yielded to the rules of relationship between the state and media which previously existed for decades.

Unfortunately, in post-Soviet Georgia, this kind of relationship between media and the government quite frequently gains momentum. The ombudsman of Georgia reported the following to the Parliament of Georgia, “Political will is of the following nature: the more freedom of expression is limited, the more comfortable the government feels. This is the main reason and under such conditions, the government thinks that the more the sources of information there are, the more problems they will cause to the government”.

The political class of Georgia needs independent media only to fight for authority. As for the ruling power, they view independent media as a threat and limit and subjugate it. In other words, politicians view media as a means to fight for power and not as an objective, which should enforce justice, ensure the development of the country and introduce democratic tendencies in the government.

Such an approach to media is particularly visible in regions, where local governments view independent media as a means to mobilize public opinion. Accordingly, throughout the decades the local authorities of many regions tried to prevent the accumulation of information in regions and curb public discussions in order to avoid creation of alternative sources of information which would challenge state sources of information. Local authorities actively intervened in functioning of semi-independent or judicially independent media-organisations.

“The Institute of Peace, Democracy and Development”, which studied the media in the regions of Georgia in 2003-2004 with the support of “Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR)” detected many cases of media suppression by the government. There are various forms of suppression of regional media – from with prohibition to attend the meetings of local councils to direct attacks on TV studios.

Regional authorities often use law-enforcement institutions and tax offices against “unfavourable” TV companies, seeks different reasons to cause harm to them. By illegal actions it is possible to gain influence over TV companies or even close them down. Such kind of precedent occurred in Kutaisi after “Rose Revolution”. As it has been noted before, two TV companies were operating in Kutaisi simultaneously – “Rioni” and “Kutaisi” which belonged to Parliament Member and Businessman Bondo Shalikiani and represented his interests. After the revolution the MP became incompatible with new political situation and as

a result TV company “Kutaisi” was closed down. According to the demand from the government the former MP gave yielded his right on ownership in favour of one of the activists of “National Movement” who did not consequently show any interest in the company which ceased functioning left without management.

However, most shocking was the case which took place in Kutaisi – in the yard of TV company “Kutaisi” the Representative of the President in Imereti region hit the journalist from Tbilisi who disputed with him some minutes earlier while participating in a talk-show. The topic of the talk-show was “Media and the Government” and this fact vividly showed what attitude local political elite had towards media.

The fact is even more embarrassing as the high authority representative publicly engaged himself in physical conflict and the central government did not even disapprove of his behaviour. This type of actions is in conflict with modern legal and moral views on criticism of politicians by journalists: “Independent media grants the best means to the society to shape and develop its attitude towards politicians’ ideas and approaches.” That’s why in the given context, “acceptable volume of criticism towards politicians is bigger than towards individuals. Unlike individuals, a politician makes his/her speech deliberately publicized and thus should show more patience” (freedom of expression... 2003:13). The patience of the Georgian political leaders towards journalists can be easily observed from the case discussed here.

There was similar situation in other regions. From 1999 till May 2004 the development of media in the Autonomous Republic of Adjara was determined by the authoritarian regime and style of Aslan Abashidze. “Democratic Institute of Peace, Democracy and Development”, which studied the state of media in the regions of Georgia in 2003-3004, provided very interesting conclusions concerning this issue:

“The leader of Adjara personally studied the material published local media about current processes in the country and region and actively interacted with media showing loyal attitude to his regime (especially, with the television which covers whole Georgia) by:

- Providing information about ongoing processes;
- Agreeing issues to be discussed with media representatives and learning their possible questions beforehand;
- coordinating the operation of media by Adjara Supreme Council Press Office and it was reflected in the homogeneity of the position of media;
- planning not only information policy of media organisations by Supreme Council Press Office, but determining staff policy of these organisations as well;

The Abashidze regime used the methods of moral oppression and power abuse:

- racketing by threats which might be caused to relatives and relations;
- physical humiliation and racketing;
- racketing and office and destroying technical resources;
- suppressing the owners and obliging them to yield the right on ownership;
- oppressing publishing houses to curb publication of independent newspapers. That's why these newspapers were printed in Tbilisi but their distribution to Adjara region was curbed on the border;
- refusing to cooperate and provide interviews or information to “unfavourable” media organisations” (Georgian Regional ... 2005: 183).

After “Rose Revolution” in Adjara TV there have not been many changes made. It still remains in state ownership (factually, it is the only state broadcasting structure in Georgia) and its authority is appointed by the Board of Ministers of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara. The issue of transparent operation of state offices and the access to information still remains a problem, but under the influence of modern times the requirements of democracy and publicity still entered media organisations which are formed as a state structure. It became vivid in Spring 2005 when the personnel of information agency went on a strike. The protest was a success through the support from local media and non-governmental organisations. The Board of Ministers of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara were obliged to meet the demands of journalists and change the head of the Department of Television and Radio who censored the programmes.

Chapter 6 – “Current Problems of Regional Broadcasting” discusses all the problems which regional TV companies face and need to resolve.

In Georgia, not including some exceptions, common problem for regional TV companies is low level of funding. This results in periodical cease of broadcasting, reduction of programmes, rejecting operative performance, etc. In order to gain financial stability rather frequently agree to deals with local authorities and seek additional sources of income.

Marketing office is very weak in regional telecommunication of Georgia. However, there are still departments of advertising in many TV company (this is the most broadly spread department in organisational structure of regional TV companies after information service and the department of youth programmes). In individual cases business people who own TV studios support their organisations.

International donor organisations still remain most reliable allies and supporters of independent electronic media which is not only financial advantage (though, it should be noted here that there is gradual scarcity of grants observed lately), but presupposes appropriate support against pressure from the government.

From financial point of view, problem is the interaction of regional TV companies to local cable channels which create illegal competition in advertising. For example, cable channel in Rustavi sells its advertising broadcasting time at a very low price and places the commercials throughout the programmes re-transmitted by it. Of course, this cable channel does not have legal rights to act this way. The majority of regional TV companies find themselves in similar situations.

The situation described above is predetermined by the absence of appropriate legal basis. National Commission for Communication of Georgia should assume responsibility in order to create sufficient regulations. In the USA for example, the legislation concerning interrelation between cable and broadcasting companies has been changed several times and currently federal laws oblige cable operators to include local broadcasting stations in their programmes.

The reduction of commercials and advertisements negatively affect the volume of funding of regional TV companies and curbs production of their own programmes. Considering this “The Association of Regional TV Companies of Georgia” appealed to the President Micheil Saakashvili and the Head of the Parliament Davit Bakradze to introduce temporary tax concessions (This letter is being considered now).

With the lack of funding one more huge problem for regional TV companies is scarce financial and technical basis and there is a necessity for renovation. This makes difficult the shift to digital broadcasting. However, much has been done in this respect by donor organisations. “The Association” has taken many efforts to equip regions with digital technology but the problem has not been eliminated yet.

What is still an issue is the structure of regional broadcasting itself – non-stable, poorly shaped programmes, non-systemic nature of regional programmes and vague conception. Of course, this is determined by social, political and economic situation in the region, poor financial and technical state of a company which causes changes in the programmes and reduction of their programmes, usage of non-licensed programmes, etc. Besides, there are subjective factors. For example, none of these problems concern Adjara state television but except news programme, the broadcasting time is filled up by films, soup operas and entertainment programmes. In case of political will there might be essential reforms which would make this television a regional broadcasting company.

Journalists also create problems to regional broadcasting, which is their poor professional qualification. “Among other professions the job of journalists is most open.” Journalists without professional diploma abound in the country of new democracy, where truth was distorted for many years, the journalism was captivated by propaganda and

journalism resource meeting the demands of new time is very scarce. As a result, in countries of new democracy, where content has priority over the form of media product, along with professional journalists, physicists, philologists, engineers, lawyers are involved in informing people.

The issue is especially vulnerable in regions where professional journalists are fewer than in the capital city. No professionalism can occur when journalists' monthly salary in regional TV companies is 100-250 GEL (maximum 150 USD). There is a frequent mobility of TV personnel which is explained by dismissed journalists themselves by the fact that the salary was minimal and workload is huge. As a result in most of TV companies the situation is the following: a person comes to work for the company and when he/she masters the profession, he/she leaves the job as the salary is not appropriate.

The situation has been tackled to a certain extent – through the support “Internews”, “IREX” and others many seminars and trainings are held for journalists working in regions and form courses. “The Association of Regional Broadcasting of Georgia” has been active in this respect recently which has trained at least 2-3 staff members of regional television companies. However, staff training problems still persist and needs much effort to be resolved.

There is another huge problem connected with the professionalism of journalists – protection of journalistic principles as there is not a single aspect of the job of journalists which needs no moral perception. The authority granted by the law appeals to some journalists and would not wish to consider the issues of following the standards or the norms of ethics. However, another part of journalists are ready to follow ethical principles but are concerned as they fear that a demand to follow standards might result in strict censorship.

The Professor of the University of Paris noted correctly saying that, “It is natural that in former Soviet countries journalists avoid responsibility to the society, as they associate it with state control. Putting it simply, they reject a code of ethics. They wish to enjoy freedom and creativity. They perceive themselves as creators of a political arena or actors and not the person who is to obtain and disseminate information. What follows is a conflict” (Journalist Ethics ... 2003:43).

The biggest ethical problem which regional TV companies face is political commitment – deals with local government. Part of TV companies, which were established by local business people, are often intended to bring economic and political power to the founder and thus often results in common interests with the government. The authorities of other TV companies do not reject a chance to gain advantages granted by local government, especially in terms of financial support with the condition that they avoid criticizing the government.

One more problematic issue is that many journalists show tendency for self-promotion and personal ambitions which is characteristic to both regional and central media equally. Many journalists enter the field with the intention to gain brisk and easy success – they view journalism as a real means to obtain power and give little thought to whether their behaviour is acceptable or morally justified. Very often this results in the conflict in the company. For example, “Mega TV” (Khoni) had been established for several years when a group of five journalists came to set up a news programme. However, soon it was clear that their only intention was to use the job for their personal ambitions and the authority of the company was obliged to fire them.

In spite of these drawbacks, the development of regional and local media attracts increasing attention of the society and journalists themselves. Some specialists think that because of the fact that regional media organisations are more or less independent from the government, the regions should be the site where there will be built the structure which will form the standards of the Georgian journalism and gain trust from the society. Only time will show whether this approach is right. What is needed at this stage is appropriate conditions for functioning of media organisations which is close to standards.

The conclusion summarises the results of the study and there are basic statements made (11 thesis) which represent regional TV broadcasting of Georgia in terms of different aspects – social and political, progressive-structural, thematic-genre. The statements show positive and negative tendencies, which accompany the advent of regional telecommunication. The conclusion is followed by recommendations which are practical to realise and we think they will improve current situation.

1. Three basic factors determined the appearance and development of independent telecommunication in Georgia: 1) Democratisation process which is under way in Georgia and which put an end to state control of information and made pluralisation of telecommunication possible. 2) Increasing interest of the population towards local information and the need for self-expression through media. 3) Systematic financial, legal and moral support from local and international non-governmental organisations. It should also be taken into consideration that unlike central channels, which scarcely highlight local problems, local independent media is trying to reflect all these problems – it is interested in politics, economics and corruption and illegal issues, criminal, social and health protection, etc.

2. Two types of regional telecommunication have been formed: the first is represented by TV companies which fill up their broadcasting time with licensed and non-licensed products, and minimal portion of their own product, approximately 2-3 hours a day. The majority, on the other hand, give their broadcasting time to certain central (national) channels

and their own programmes are imbedded in the broadcasting time of the central channel. They also provide a pack of their own products with the volume 2-3 hours. This type of cooperation is advantageous to weak regional TV company to fill up its broadcasting time and allows strong companies to transmit their own programmes with minimal expenditure. This somehow resembles the USA national network structure where NBC, CBC and ABC have hundreds of TV stations as partners in different regions of the country. Such kind of broadcasting did not exist in Georgia previously.

3. It is almost 20 years that foreign donor organisations have been operating in Georgia and they help regional TV companies in three respects: 1) Grants to renovate and develop technology, 2) grants for separate programmes and 3) seminar-trainings in order to prepare professional and raise their qualification (including translating and publishing the literature in Georgian). They also provided advocating service – the protection of TV companies against the oppression from the government and supporting their rights;

4. International donor organizations greatly contributed to the support the integration of regional TV organizations. In 1996 through active support of US non-governmental organization “Internews Network” “Television Network of Georgia” (TNG) was set up. This was the first union of independent telecommunications of Georgia (overall 16 TV companies). It was followed by the establishment of “the Association of Regional Telecommunications of Georgia”. Initially the association was technically supported by “Internews” and “Irex”. Currently it is technically and financially supported by the Dutch organization “Press Now”, “Eurasian Cooperation Fund”, fund “Open Society – Georgia” and USA Embassy in Georgia. The aim of the association is to support sustainable development of regional telecommunication companies in order to make freedom of expression available to the society and ensure that the society is better informed and active. Currently the association unifies 24 TV companies and prepares a weekly programme “Polygon” which is broadcast by each member company. The association works hard to become a member of “the Association of Regional Broadcasting Companies of Europe” (CERCOM). At the same time establishes links with other unions as well, such as “UNICEF”, “The Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies”, “The Association of Regional Media”, etc.

5. Media space is diverse according to the regions of Georgia which is determined by geographical peculiarities, economic and cultural development of each region. The difference between regional TV companies is shaped by the volume of coverage, broadcasting time, the duration of their own programmes within their broadcasting time and the type of broadcasting. All regional broadcasting companies broadcast news (basically local news), but the quality of their information service varies dramatically. While TV companies provide

daily news, and some of them several times during the day, the majority limit themselves to 3-4 issues during the week. Some TV companies even manage to produce information-analytical programme summarizing major events of the week. As for other types of programmes, it is typical for regional TV companies to provide political, mainly, interactive talk-shows, programmes for children and religious programmes. More scarce are programmes covering the history of the region and ethnographic issues. Entertainment productions make up major part of almost all regional channels – these products are obtained through different ways (as there is no market for TV programmes in Georgia), films and video productions, music clips, etc.

6. The sharpest problem of regional telecommunication is financial state. There is either poorly developed or hardly developed market of commercials, few are advertisements; the income from congratulations and obituaries is miserable. The only way of survival for independent TV companies is to develop financially profitable connections: they should participate and become winners in projects funded by international organisations aiming at the development of media; or cooperate with government or political-economic groups; there is ground for some optimism, because ensuring independence and development of regional broadcasting is a vulnerable issue and creates the core of public interest. This tendency determines the possibility of attracting partners, funds and other resources.

7. Technical basis of regional TV studio is determined by its involvement in network of different groups possessing political and economic interests and the network of social and international organisations. As the situation analysis shows, from technical point of view, the organisations which received support from international donor organisation are in more favourable conditions. In spite of the support, lack of professional telecommunication equipment and the need for renovation is common for almost all regional TV companies. The situation is further exacerbated by the necessity for the companies to acquire new broadcasting skills and the demand to shift to digital broadcasting.

8. Due to lack of financial resources the majority of regional TV companies have hard times to meet strict demands concerning broadcasting licensed and translated or subtitled products. This causes deficit in their broadcasting time and challenge their competitiveness on the market.

9. Most essential factor for the development of regional telecommunication is the issue of qualified staff which is linked to financial status of companies, the city where they broadcast, infrastructure, etc. Administrative centres of regions and big industrial cities have better qualified staff. In minor agrarian regional centres the staff is usually formed by amateurs (with the monthly salary 100-250 GEL) and the problem of personnel arises. Young

people possessing professional qualification in journalism prefer to work in the capital city or at non-governmental and international organisations on the site. Though foreign donor organisations “Internews” and “IREX” had great contribution in this respect, the problem still persists.

10. The relationship between regional TV companies and local governments is another vital issue. Lack of funding puts pressure on some regional TV companies to be loyal to local governing authorities to gain financial support from them. Local political elite also understood that the effect on the society can be essential through television. Accordingly, there are two standards employed by the government towards local TV media: loyal TV companies are supported and financed, and those with critical disposition are viewed as supporters of anti-government aspiration among the society. All forms of suppression are used against critically oriented TV companies – abolishing the company’s accreditation through local departments and actually attacking the studios. The government is particularly irritated when “banned” topics are publicly discussed, such as abuse of natural resources, deals among business clans, high criminal rate, corruption of state authorities, drawbacks in social and health services, etc.

11. Majority of acting journalist operating in Georgia have two basic problems – fear to tell the truth and lack of public trust. The fact that majority of mass media is regulated by the governments and their associate business class inspires lack of trust among the public towards certain information sources. “Being regulated” is in conflict with principles of journalism when a journalist does not take trouble any more to analyse local problems and gives priority to “highlighting” the deeds of the governing bodies. Another ethical dilemma is journalists’ endeavours to promote themselves and use mass media to reach their political and economic objectives.

Judging according to current state of regional telecommunication of Georgia, the following can be recommended:

1. In order to pursue its public functions, regional telecommunication should become completely independent. First of all, TV and Radio Department of Adjara should be transformed into Public Broadcasting Company. Besides, those TV companies, whose part of the shares belongs to local government should be freed from the suppression. Otherwise they will not be able to overcome their influence;

2. Regional TV channel (which is not linked into the network of central channel) should not assume common national functions as their responsibility. Each individual TV company function is determined by the region and its specificity. Such kind of TV companies should determine their profile, form optimal structure of broadcasting which will play its role in disseminating information;

3. The role of “the Association of the Georgian Telecommunications” should be increased as a main source of programmes for regional channels, because there is no independent market for TV programmes. Common database of programmes should be created which will include production acquired from outer sources, as well as more than 100 programmes created by the Georgian companies themselves. This will increase the diversity of programmes on regional broadcasters;

4. It is also advisable that the fund supporting regional telecommunication companies be created through the support of international donor organisations aiming at technical and financial support;

5. With the support of the Association the demands of advertising market should be met effectively, common commercial offers of member companies should be coordinated, common pack of the sales of broadcasting time should be developed which will positively affect financial status of both regional telecommunication companies as well as the Association itself;

6. Current state of web-pages of regional companies show that much work has to be carried out to prepare new professionals in the field. The perspective of regional internet broadcasting is rather feasible as well. “The Association of the Georgian Telecommunications” should help its members to master new technologies. Common server should be operated to serve the purpose and the system for common programmes should be developed;

7. There is absolute necessity for changes of judicial nature which will cover tax concessions for regional broadcasting companies. This will also regulate the issues with local cable channels;

8. Work has to be carried out to raise qualification of the personnel of regional broadcasting companies. Though foreign donor organisations have done much work in this respect, but there are some other sources as well – internship at partner central TV companies, cooperation with academics, etc.

9. Partner TV companies and central TV channels in general should give more attention to regional companies in terms of political support but through giving professional recommendations and providing them with space in their broadcasting time. The appearance of regional broadcasting companies on common national channels will reduce the deficit of regional news and enrich their programmes, but would also provide a stimulus for the development of regional companies. This is particularly true of “Public Broadcaster of Georgia” whose direct function is to make the society aware of different social groups in

different regions. This could be done by providing regional companies with weekly time for at least common programme of regional broadcasting companies – “Polygon”.

We think that putting these recommendations into practice, even partly, is feasible and if they are taken into consideration there would be the possibility to prepare the programmes to support further development of regional broadcasting companies.

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