



ევროკავშირი  
საქართველოსთვის  
The European Union for Georgia



## Media Monitoring for the Local 2017 Self-Government Elections in Georgia

### Interim Report of Talk Shows Media Monitoring

August 19 – October 9



საქართველოს  
შურნალისტური  
ეთიკის ქარტია

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## About the Project

The Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics is implementing the monitoring of talk shows for coverage of the 2017 Local Government Elections within the framework of the project Study and Research on Election Media Coverage for 2017 Local Government Elections in Georgia supported by the European Union (EU) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Monitors observe 14 TV Channel's primetime political talk shows and the parts of the news programs which offer audience more than 10 minutes' interview time with respondents. Monitoring is carried out on the following TV channels: Public Broadcaster, Rustavi 2, Imedi, Pirveli, Obiektivi, Ajara Public Broadcaster, TV Channel 25, Rioni, Gurjaani, Guria, Kvemo Kartli, Trialeti, Odishi and Ninth Channel. Out of the TV channels that are monitored, five channels are national stations, while nine are regional.

The monitoring started on August 19, 2017. Part of the talk shows were first aired in early September, and some even later. TV companies "Odishi" and "Gurjaani" have not aired any talk shows. The given report reflects the analysis of the programs that aired from August 19 to October 9.

## Methodology

Following entities were the subjects of the monitoring:

- President
- Government
- Political parties

The monitors observed how the research subjects appeared in the TV programs. Each talk show was evaluated according to the following criteria: Whether the topic of the program is relevant, how appropriate is the qualification of the invited guests to the discussion topic, whether the selection of the guests is biased, how well is the discussion led by the host, how good are his/her questions, how prepared is the host, is he/she giving the opportunity to the guest to disseminate false information, whether the program is used to propagate hate speech. Overall, whether the audience gets any additional information that will enable them to make reasonable Arcevani.

## Key Findings:

- Unlike 2016, national broadcasters offered a strictly scripted talk show where all qualified election subjects were invited and therefore the criteria of inviting guests to the program was clear. If any of the candidates did not attend the program, the hosts were informing the audience about it. In almost all cases, the balance between the guests was preserved.
- In the talk shows, where the time was strictly defined for the candidates to present their vision and opinions, the focus was on the format of the program and not on the content. The proposed format looked more like the presentation of candidates rather than a typical talk show. However, this format contributed to equal distribution of time among the respondents.
- Apart from a rare exception, every candidate was provided equal opportunity to present their campaign promises to the public, but there was less critical discussion of the election programs.
- In general, the questions of the TV presenters were very broad and did not derive from a specific election program. The hosts did not ask critical and counter questions, so it remained unclear for the voters whether the campaign promises of candidates were realistic.
- As during the 2016 elections, broad questions were asked, such as: "What do you promise to the voters? What problem will you solve first? How many mandates are you going to take in elections?" This enabled the respondents to lead the discussion into the direction convenient to them.
- The problem of the qualification of the TV presenters was particularly noticeable on the regional channels, where there were practically no critical questions asked.
- In general, regional broadcasters have significant technical problems related to the voice, visual side, packaging of the program. These problems make the programs less attractive to the audience.
- Several cases of hate speech were observed, but such was mainly used by the respondents. The hosts often reacted adequately. There was one case when the host contributed to strengthening gender stereotypes.
- The TV company Obiektivi is different from any other channels. Its program - "Night Studio" is a platform for the political party Alliance of Patriots. The program mostly hosts the party members. 48 representatives of Alliance of Patriots visited the "Night Studio"

during the monitoring period and only one of the other qualified subjects were invited to the program. The program is full of anti-western and anti-Turkish rhetoric, hate speech, insulting vocabulary and unanswered allegations against opponents.

### **Public Broadcaster**

In the pre-election period, the Public Broadcaster offered to the audience the program "Self-Government 2017" which introduced the election candidates to the public. The program has been broadcasted three times a week from September 18. Unlike 2016, when three TV programs were aired on election topics, including the most positively evaluated program "Interview", this year no such "Hard Talk" format programs were aired, where the acute questions could be asked.

### **Self-Government 2017**

During the reporting period, the mayoral candidates of the following towns visited the TV program: Batumi, Ozurgeti, Poti, Kutaisi, Ambrolauri, Akhaltsikhe, Mtskheta. The program team arrived in the regions and directly from the town, from the open-air studio offered the visions of the candidates to the viewers. Each of them had the equal opportunity to express opinions on the issues selected for the discussion.

At the beginning of the program the brief biography of the guests was offered and the the election slogan was introduced; if the invited candidate did not participate in the program, the TV presenter informed the public about it as well. The questions asked to the candidates derived from the vox pop.

According to the information published on the broadcaster's website, the TV program envisaged debates among the candidates, but due to the format of the show, the discussions did not take place among participants and they only presented their visions. The TV host had the passive role; he/she did not formulate additional questions, did not ask for in depth answers and asked only one general question (how do you plan to ...?), giving 2 minutes to each candidate for an answer. Due to the format, the host had no possibility to ask counter questions, when he/she did not receive answers from the guests. For example, [on October 2](#), the host asked question to the candidate from "Democratic Movement" regarding the problem of gasification in Racha and the answer was about collection and acquisition of cones; The representative of UNM was asked

about the landfill and the response was regarding the cutting of timber and interests of Bidzina Ivanishvili in this regard.

In the end of the TV program, the presenter asked different questions to each candidate, but the questions were still general. On September 22 the journalist asked the question to the candidate of unified opposition on how he would tackle the problems of municipal transport. This question was quite illogical as this candidate became known to the wider public due to his accusations towards the local journalist, Giorgi Girkelidze, regarding which “Guria News” filed a suit against him. It would be more reasonable to ask questions regarding this, for the viewers to have clear understanding of this situation, and for the public to learn what would be the governing style of the candidate, whether he understands the freedom of media and expression.

The questions were almost identical in all cities and were related to municipal transport, water supply and development problems. These are the problematic issues throughout Georgia, but there is still a set of issues in the municipalities that are particular to only this municipality, such as the problem of the tortoise beetles in Zugdidi; In Kutaisi -the the issue of the city’s main functionality - parliamentary, university city or touristic city connected to the international airport, etc. This specification has not been considered in any of the TV programs. Very often in vox pop people raise different problems and the questions do not cover these issues.

The guests could not even ask questions to each other. As a result, the candidates were disseminating the information they wanted to spread, promising public to solve the problems of the society. It was unclear whether their promises were realistic due to absence of counter questions. The viewers did not have an opportunity to make an informed analysis of how the candidates could fulfill their promises.

As the TV studio was arranged in the open air, it has created additional problems due to meteorological conditions. For instance, on September 29th, Kutaisi mayoral candidates and journalists had to conduct several-hour discussion in strong wind, which was causing technical problems, sound interruption, shaking images, etc. One of the respondents, Grigol Vashadze, even noted that it was unbearable to debate in such conditions. Because of such unbearable conditions, there was an impression that the only wish of the respondents was to quickly finish their speech and complete the program, which simply turned entire program into formality.

## Rustavi 2

In the pre-election period, TV Company Rustavi 2 offered two TV programs to its viewers - Giorgi Gabunia's Archevani and Eka Kvesitadze's Aktsentebi. The first program was aired once in September, and from October it is aired twice a week, while the other program is aired two times a week. Archevani presented to the audience the candidates' visions, while in Aktsentebi there were discussions on various issues.

### Archevani

In the reporting period the candidates of Rustavi, Batumi, Kutaisi, Tbilisi Mayor and Sakrebulo visited the program. However, before the nomination of candidates, a special Archevani was held on September 7, with the only guest - Mikheil Saakashvili, leader of the National Movement who was planning to enter Ukraine from Polish border on September 10, despite the deprivation from Ukrainian citizenship. Within 45 minutes, the TV presenter asked general and less critical questions, giving chance to the respondent to talk freely about the topics he wanted to talk about, e.g. how Ukrainian president was afraid of him, what a coward his opponent was and so on.

The first block of the election format program was allocated to the views of the candidates and each of them had equal time to speak. The host was performing a moderator function and required the answers from each candidate within the specified time, regarding the ways of solving the problems selected as a result of the vox pop. The guests gave general promises on regulating the parking problem, drainage system, creating jobs, but they did not specify how they would manage all these and due to the format of the program the host did not ask follow-up questions and did not oppose them.

In the second block of the program the journalists were invited from each candidate's region. Each of them had 10 minutes to ask the question. Their questions were also general, covering several topics. The questions did not derive from the answers. Therefore, the answers were not specific as well. As a result, it remained unclear for the voters how the candidate would be able to fulfill their election promises. In this regard, the program aired on September 12 needs to be mentioned, in which the journalist from town Rustavi asked the following questions to the candidates:

- *You've mentioned that you are going to build sports palace, is this true?* (12.09) – It is unclear what prompted the journalist to ask this question, if no critical, specific questions would follow.
- *How do you plan to solve the unemployment problem when each year many people are fired from Rustavi Azot and Rustavi Metallurgical Plant?* It remained unclear what was the journalist's intention, how the personnel cut in the private company was related to the Mayor's office?
- *How available would you be to the citizens of Rustavi?*
- *What's your position regarding the nepotism?* - Naturally, all candidates stated that nepotism was inadmissible and it would not happen during their service as a Mayor.
- *How do you see yourself in the legislative (!) body?* – Respondent corrected the question that Sakrebulo was the representative body and not the legislative body.

The same questions were asked to the candidates of other towns. For example, how would they solve the social, transportation problems etc. In this block, it would be advisable to know the candidates' programs beforehand and ask specific, reasonable questions based on that knowledge.

### **Aktsentebi**

The first block of the program offered to the viewers the discussions on specific topic, while in the second block of the program the Tbilisi Mayoral candidates had to answer the questions of the host in the format of Hard Talk. The program was quite dynamic and the viewers obtained much additional information about the discussion topic. The host tried to be pushing and critical. However, sometimes she opposed the candidates with simple irony rather than actual data and quotes. Also, there were cases when due to the factual inaccuracies in the questions, the host received some criticism from the respondents. For example, during Kakha Kukava's visit to the program on September 9 she mentioned that he was nominated as a candidate by the Nino Burjanadze Party, when in fact he is the candidate of the block of two political parties. This seemingly minor mistake allowed the guest to criticize the journalist for being unprepared. One of the candidates, Irma Inashvili (16.09), brought the same accusation to the host, regarding her question on why she and her party did not express loud protest over constitutional amendments when all other opposition parties and civil society groups protested it. The



respondent replied that the host was unprepared, as she was actively criticizing the process, which was true <sup>1</sup>.

In the same program, Giorgi Gugava, a Tbilisi mayoral candidate for the Labor Party, voiced his accusation against his rival Kakha Kaladze, calling him corrupted, Mafia boss and so on. But the journalist did not request any evidence that could convince the viewers of the relevance of these allegations.

The conversation with Gugava and Irma Inashvili was less focused on concrete election promises. It would be better to have more in-depth and fact-based questions about specific promises. For instance, Inashvili said that she was going to establish a fund on the basis of the City Hall, which would be oriented on microbusiness development. It would be interesting to have a more in-depth conversation about this foundation, on how realistic or outcome-oriented would it be when such organizations like Partnership Fund and Co-Investment Fund already exist in the country.

Discussion with Aleko Elisashvili, independent candidate for Tbilisi Mayor, was dedicated to the clarifying issues such as why he was passive during the noisy sessions of Tbilisi City Council. There were questions that were based on hypothetical doubts of the journalist - for instance why he had unstable election campaign, why had he refused to collaborate with the Republicans, was it because of their campaign against the church and so on. Despite the fact that in the vox pop, the respondents asked for answers to the issues related to traffic policy, the protection of historic buildings and so on, the journalist did not ask these questions to the mayoral candidate. accordingly, Elisashvili had no opportunity to talk about how to solve these problems. It would be better for the journalist to argue the opinions and the audience to understand the relevance of the candidate's vision.

### **Imedi**

In the pre-election period, TV Imedi aired public-political Talk Show Amomrchevlis Pirispir once in a week.

The format of the program was not solid. For example, Kutaisi mayoral candidates participated in the first block of the first program, while the second one covered the election environment and Tbilisi City Council candidates were invited to the third program. In all three programs,

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<sup>1</sup> <http://go.on.ge/fth>

the second block was dedicated to the party presentation in the three programs, while in the fourth program the first block was for party presentation and election environment was discussed in the second block and only three parties (Georgian Dream, National Movement, European Georgia) were invited to speak about this issue. The principle of their selection was vague, since the election environment also applies to other candidates. The TV host distributed the time equally.

The questions asked by the presenter to the election subjects were general and was based on the results of the vox pop. For example, Kutaisi mayoral candidates (12.09) were asked what was their opinion regarding the water supply, street trading and infrastructure problems in Kutaisi. In fact, the TV presenter had only a moderator function and did not ask follow-up, critical questions, did not present any counter arguments. As a result, it was unclear whether the candidates could solve the problems and how realistic their promises were. For example, it became obvious from the TV program that the water supply was problematic issue for Kutaisi population. Every candidate stated that they would solve this problem in a different way. However, the journalist did not ask the candidates to clarify how exactly they would tackle this issue, whether they had estimated the costs of their projects and how they were going to get these funds. Questions and answers on most of the problematic topics were general and lacked specificities and, therefore, many details remained obscure to the audience.

As for the part of the party's presentation, during the reporting period following election subjects visited this format of the program: Alliance of Patriots, Dimitri Lortkipanidze, Kakha Kukava - Democratic Movement - Free Georgia, European Georgia and National Movement. In this block of the program more and more questions were asked from which it was clear that the presenter was unprepared. However, in several cases it seemed that the journalist had not researched the topic. On [September 12](#), the host reminded the guests that they were constantly appealing to the people who moved from the National Movement to Georgian Dream, while in parallel to this, in the current year the candidate of Alliance of Patriots in Akhalkalaki was representative of the National Movement in 2012-2016. Irma Inashvili responded to this "hard" question by claiming that this candidate was in the Georgian Dream during the mentioned period. The host did not comment further. It would be better for the host to learn more about this case in advance.

There were instances where the respondent voiced xenophobic and sexist expressions. For example, on [September 19](#), Kakha Kukava said that "we must prevent building Arabian and Turkish districts, it is harmful and we must begin deporting these migrants in compliance with

the law and international standards." The host did not ask the follow-up questions and the details remained unclear: what was meant under the Turkish and Arab districts, specifically where were such districts located? how was he going to prevent its construction and especially "in accordance with the law and international standards"? Why the existence of such districts was harmful (if there was any) and how Kukava was going to deport the migrants?

On [September 26](#), Nika Melia, the first number in the electoral list of UNM, used sexist expressions against Marika Darchia, the Georgian Dream's first number. Instead of using name, he referred to her as "Kalbatono [Madam]", "Forgive me, Kalbatono ... I'm very sorry that I have to debate with the lady [Kalbatoni]". Later, he emphasized once again that it was very uncomfortable for him to "debate with the woman [Kalbatoni]" - "I do not feel comfortable, first of all because you are a lady [Kalbatoni]". The host did not point out to Mr. Melia that both had the same number in the party list and had the same status despite their gender.

It should be noted that on September 19 the host mentioned in the introduction that: "*The temptation to support the election campaigns is very high. Western countries took decades to solve this problem. We still live in the country where we often hear without evidence that the ruling party uses administrative resources in the pre-election period. Neither the governmental team avoids self-justification*". There are many facts of using the administrative resources, which is confirmed by reports prepared by monitoring organizations and reported in media. Consequently, the statement made by the host as if there was no proof of the allegations, gave the viewers impression that there are no such violations in Georgia.

## **Qronika**

In the news program Qronika there was a case when the interviews with the subjects of the monitoring were included into the program. The discussion topic was based on current affairs and there was an impression that the host was biased towards the government authorities. For example, on September 23 Irakli Abesadze from European Georgia and Mamuka Mdinardze from Georgian Dream talked about the Venice Commission report. It was difficult for the TV presenter to moderate the debate of lawyers. There was an impression that the host was critical towards the opposition rather than the government. The host did not interrupt Mamuka Mdinardze when he tried to discredit the opposition representative with unreasonable arguments: "*We have parties that undertake obviously anti-Western campaigns, and they do not hide it, and Irakli [Abesadze] and his team, together with other declared pro-Western parties will have to sit with them, they are united by the constitution, i.e. they think as our*

*neighbors in the North? What should we think in this case”?* The journalist would allow the MP to continue discussing other issues and if not Abesadze's persistent attempt to react to this illogical assertion this argumentation would remain undisputed.

The bias of the host was still felt on September 30 when Archil Talakvadze from Georgian Dream and Zurab Chiaberashvili from European Georgia were interviewed. Zurab Tchiaberashvili spoke about the pre-election violations and the facts of violence, the host interrupted him and reminded that such facts were happening during his government as well and asked him to give some hints on how to fight against such violations. It is obvious that it is absolutely legitimate to talk to the former member of the National Movement about past mistakes, but to put the issue in such way that the government wants to fight with the problem, but just needs advice, excludes the fact that only ordinary activists are responsible for these violations and not the government. Instead of answering specific allegations, the TV host gave the opportunity to Archil Talakvadze to talk about positive trends in terms of the comparison of violations of the United National Movement to the violations of the Georgian Dream, and on the contrary, to accuse the opposition for these violations.

### **TV Pirveli**

TV Company "Pirveli" offers several talk-shows to the audience during the day, but only those programs were monitored that are broadcasted after 8pm. In the beginning of the monitoring (August) Dghis Ambebi was aired, while in September the programming changed a little and each day different talk show was aired - Reaktsia, Khalkhis Pirispir, Politmeter, Pirvelebi (twice a week). In the pre-election period, the channel tried to introduce to the viewers both political parties and mayoral candidates.

#### **Dghis Ambebi**

At the beginning of the monitoring, the program was broadcasted every day. Mostly daily news was discussed in the talk show, and the TV presenters tried to obtain more information from the guests regarding the above-mentioned issues. The hosts did not show their bias and were fairly distributing time among the guests. In most cases the guests were relevant. On August 24, independent Tbilisi mayoral candidate criticized the government and the CEC for arranging electoral manipulations and artificially complicating the pre-election environment. He also spoke about the bribery of the voters by the Georgian Dream. The host focused only on the registration of Elisashvili and did not express interest in voter bribing.

## **Khalkhis Politika**

The program was aired once a week and envisaged debates between the mayoral candidates as well as the discussion of the current affairs, such as the confrontation at City Council, the relation between the Church and the State and etc. As for the mayoral candidates, during the reporting period candidates from Batumi, Kutaisi, Ozurgeti, Rustavi were invited.

In the first block of the program, which was related to a variety of topics, mostly relevant guests were invited. However, there were cases when the program was totally built on mutual accusations and controversy, and was less intended to provide information to the audience. For example, on September 4, a talk show was dedicated to the appointment of art director at the state theaters. The guest gave a number of allegations against the former art director, Ketii Dolidze, without provision of any evidence; later Dolidze got involved as well and continued counter accusations. The discussion last for about 1.5 hours and mostly it was unsubstantiated allegations, personal insults by the respondents and so on.

One of the respondents in the program, Jelal Kikava, repeatedly used, unethical remarks towards Bidzina Ivanishvili, but the presenter did not react to that. In addition to that, the guest Gia Chanturia, was presented as the former General Director of the Public Broadcaster and it was not mentioned that he was a majoritarian candidate of the National Movement in Didube.

As for the visit of the mayoral candidates, the host was allocating time equally, although this time was not mechanically distributed. This gave the guests the opportunity to answer statements, object to each other, ask questions. In some cases, the discussion was intense, but the host led it well. Discussed topics included the major issues for the region the candidates were nominated from. The host was asking verifiable questions, logically developing discussion. But on September 11, when the member of Alliance of Patriots stated that "the city was transferred to the Turks" and the city "is headed to the destruction", the host did not oppose and just asked "what do you want to tell the voters with that?" Overall this part of the program was dynamic and interesting.

## **Reaktsia**

Current affairs were discussed and many guests participated in the program. In some cases, the discussion was in mutual allegation mode and the host was unable to moderate the guests. There were insulting statements (e.g. 7.09). There were programs when the TV host mostly followed

the topic raised by respondents and required answers to those questions posed by the guests (e.g. 19.09).

On September 5, the topic of the program was so called "Cyanide Case." The journalist raised important questions about the case the society was concerned about. In the second block of the program the representatives of political parties were invited to talk about the electoral environment and they continued to speak on the same topic. Discussion started with the interactive question – “Do you agree with the court verdict that Archpriest Mamaladze is guilty?” In general, such formulation of the question initiates very hypothetical discussion. That is why in the debates with politicians it is better to ask questions based on factual circumstances. Due to such hypothetical question, the focus of the conversation moved to the "seeds of evil planted by the United National Movement" and the opponents discussed the "cyanide case" in this context. This was followed by general statements, confrontation, and unsubstantiated conversations in the studio. The journalist said that "Georgian Dream seems to have a strategy - to talk about the past". But in fact, it was the responsibility of the host not to drive the debates into this direction and to moderate the discussion so that it is substantial and to the point.

Instead of debates, the program aired on September 21 became the platform for allegations, discreditation and hate speech as it was dedicated to the far-right demonstration, so-called "The Georgian March". In the program, the number of march representatives dominated in quantity. It seemed as if they were trying to save Georgia, sacrifice themselves to the country and everyone else was against them. Lado Sadgobelashvili's speech was insulting, homophobic and inadequate. He directed the defamation spread against businessman Vano Chkhartishvili to Tbilisi mayoral candidate Giorgi Vashadze and called Vashadze's brother a homosexual; then the host - Inga Grigolia interfered, broke him off the air, apologized and promised that she would no longer invite so many guests on air. Despite this, the program ended with Sandro Bregadze's homophobic and insulting speech. In his speech, he tried to discredit the various groups of society including politicians and journalists, NGOs, foreigners, Open Society [Soros] Foundation, sexual minorities. The host could not stop him. It is the responsibility of the journalist to select guests so that their own program does not become a hate speech platform.

On October 3 , the program hosted Tbilisi Mayor candidates. Big part of the questions asked to one of the candidates Aleko Elisashvili, was a request to comment on the statements made by others. Another candidate Kakha Kaladze was switched to the air from the place where he presented his economic program, but the host was not interested in details of this program.

Actually, the audience did not receive valuable information about the election program and pre-election promises.

### **Pirvelebi**

From September 22, a new program was aired, where TV hosts of TV Pirveli presented political parties. National Movement, Alliance of Patriots, Aleksandre Elisashvili, Movement of Development, New Unity - Georgia, Republican Party, Labor Party were invited to the program within the reporting period.

According to the format, party leaders, mayoral candidates and supporters were invited to the studio. At the beginning of the program, the audience was offered a brief background information on each party, after which the parties could present their own visions.

Journalists were asking logical questions and in some cases opposed the politicians quite well. For example, on September 28, big part of the program was dedicated to the development of agriculture and economy, as well as the attitudes of the Alliance of Patriots on attracting investments. The host managed to show how relevant were their promises and visions to the audience, as well as ask interesting questions about their relationship with Russia. In contrast, in case of the United National Movement (22.09) much time was spent on their self-determination: who was the party's leader, whose party is the National Movement today. Less time was allocated to the party's election program and candidates. Zaal Udumashvili gave a very superficial presentation of his program to the audience. The questions of the presenters were logical, but only gave a general picture. During the program, guest Grigol Vashadze was irritated by the questions and he cursed but the presenters had an adequate reaction and noted that Vashadze did not act properly. In case of Labor Party, much time was dedicated to the party's experience in self-government elections, which was less interesting in 2017.

Unlike the first three programs, at the end of the monitoring period, the parties were given one hour instead of two hours. The reason for this uneven distribution was unknown to the audience.

### **Politmeter**

The program discussed current news with the invited guests. The host was mostly well prepared for the program. Time was evenly distributed to the guests, though the program discussed issues that had already been discussed, including by TV Pirveli itself. For example, such issues

included the new constitution, change of the status of the Tabor Mountain and Pushkin Square. Accordingly, the audience did not receive any new information and analysis. No critical questions regarding the election program were asked.

### Obiektivi

Daily program Ghamis Studia which starts at 22:20 of the TV company Obiektivi was monitored during the reporting period.

#### Ghamis Studia

Just as during the 2016 parliamentary elections, this program is a platform for only one party, the Alliance of Patriots. The party's representative was invited to the program in total 47 times. Only seven members of other parties were invited. Out of this, only one was the representative of the qualified subjects – the Democratic Movement. Other political parties did not get a chance to participate in the program. Both party leaders Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi and Irma Inashvili frequently visited the program and acted like at home. They even pointed to the host when to transfer the calls from the audience.

In general, the presenters and their respondents (members of the Alliance of Patriots) were in complete agreement and virtually no different opinion was heard. Each of them had a chance to disseminate their ideas and inaccurate facts. The topics of the program are often tailored to party activities. For instance, in September, several hours were dedicated to the rallies of the Alliance of Patriots and there was an impression that the program was aimed at mobilizing people to this demonstration.

The hosts directly express sympathy to the Alliance of Patriots, for example, on September 6 the host told Irma Inashvili: "*We've seen on TV the bureau sitting or parliament sessions and how the Georgian Patriots and you particularly are fighting to bring the people's needs to the government at the Parliament*". On September 16, Irma Inashvili was called a "hero", while the "Alliance of Patriots" was referred as "Force of Patriotic Spirit".

It should also be noted that it was often difficult to verify the topic of the program because the guests and the host discussed diverse topics and did not actually have the focus on one issue. For example, on August 24, the guest Davit Tarkhan Mouravi talked about Saakashvili, "Bokerias", "Soroses", Tao-Klarjeti, Turkey, the Ottoman Empire, World War II, Hitler and



Heimler's policies and on fascist concentration camps, while according to the announcement, the topic of the program should have been Russo-Georgian relations.

Several narratives are repeated in the program:

NATO - Russia - Georgia Relations: Members of the Alliance of Patriots with the help of presenters spread opinions as if Georgia has no prospects of joining NATO. Dilemma - NATO or Abkhazia and South Ossetia is posed; the need for dialogue with Russia is raised, and for this, creation of the new - NATO-Russia-Georgia format is propagated.

The Party members visited Russia. There was an impression that the program was trying to justify this visit. The host also helped and attempted to raise skepticism towards NATO. For example, the following question was asked: "*Despite engagement in the Geneva format - despite the engagement and desires of Brussels - the key to the return of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region is Russia, and if the government, political parties are not able to negotiate with Russia won't we face bigger threat?*" After that, the respondent Davit Tarkhan Mouravi disseminated false information as if NATO did not plan to expand, as it did not want additional conflicts with Russia ... "Such thinking is tragic - how can NATO or UN or anything be exchanged for Sokhumi and Tskhinvali? ... "he stated (24.08).

Ada Marshania, who arrived from Russia on September 1, was welcomed by the host in Russian with the phrase " S Priezdom" (Welcome back). While speaking about Russian-Georgian relations, the host and the guest used Russian terms, the host did not oppose to the visitor's false information according to which (23:09:58) "We are cooperating with NATO in a way that our militaries die, I think in all the hot spots on the planet".

Turkophobia is another narrative which is heard in this program and not only the guests but also the presenters share this opinion. For example, on September 23, Davit Tarkhan-Mouravi said that "Ajara has been captured by Turks." The host also agreed: "Yes, it is demographic, cultural and social expansion."

Loss of national values is the main line of the program and aims to discredit western culture and political system. The visitor and the host try to convince the audience that with the Western education the national identity could be lost, because the knowledge obtained there "cannot teach you to be Georgian."

The criticism of the National Movement and the Georgian Dream is common. Whatever the talk show is about, the leaders of the Alliance of Patriots discuss the "National Movement" as the universal evil, including the leaders of European Georgia. European Georgia is referred to as "Bokerias" [Bokeriebi]. There is also the criticism of the Georgian Dream and the attempt to demonize its leaders in this program. For example, guest (27.08) Vazha Otashvili said about Irakli Kobakhidze: "I saw in this boy, in this kid, not the speaker of the Parliament, but the robot speaking Georgian language. This is very dangerous for our Georgian state ... I have seen that there are many Kobakhidzes or Georgian-speaking robots; this is new phenomenon of the next generation, their blood has been changed".

### **Ajara**

At the TV Channel Ajara, the monitors observed the talk shows - Akhali Sivrtse and Factor, as well as the part of the news release Kviris Mtavari, where the monitoring subjects were interviewed.

#### **Akhali Sivrtse**

At the beginning of the monitoring, the program was aired once a week. From the second half of September the program switched to the pre-election mode, and now it can be watched several times a week.

Before the transfer of the program to the pre-election mode, diverse topics were selected for discussion and many guests were invited, which, in some cases, could hinder the logical development of the program. For example, on September 14, there were 15 guests invited and in fact the time was up when all the guests expressed their opinion regarding the electoral environment. However, the host was asking critical questions and tried not to ignore false allegations during the entire program.

On August 31, Batumi architecture was discussed. The journalist asked broad questions - "What are the problems in architecture? What is this style called? How the contemporary style was mixed with the old one? What would you plan to do? " In response, the host received long and general answers. The employees of the City Hall were on air as well and it would have been better for the journalist to be armed with specific facts and arguments, to know the cases of violations of the regulations and to require answers from them. The host also did not give the chance to the critics to oppose to City Hall employees. Out of 15 guests, only two were critically disposed and qualified in this field. Host gave floor to one of them (Shota Gujabidze) after 1

hour and 8 minutes from the start of the program and to the other (representative of the National Movement) at the end of the program. The host finished the program after listening to his objections.

As for the electoral program, the format was mostly offering the presentation of election subjects and was less intended for discussion. Even though the host tried to ask some specific verifying questions, he did not oppose the candidates and gave tribune to the guests. Accordingly, instead of the talk show there was a platform for the election subjects. Along with the leader of the party, the party members were also present in the studio. The party leaders defined who and when should discuss which issue. On September 28, when the program hosted the election subject "Zviadi's Path in the Name of the Lord", the program finished so that four guests in the studio not only had no opportunity to express their opinions, but also their identities remained unknown.

At the end of the program, the leader of the Development Movement Merab Abashidze presented his colleagues, praising them as "good men", "the bastion of the community" and so on. One of the guests, Makvala Garikidze, was appraised as "a very successful housewife". The host had not reacted to that.

It would be better for the host to be prepared, to learn more about the candidates' programs and to ask substantial questions for the program to have logical development. Also, to ensure that respondents give valuable information to the audience and the program is not transformed into a party tribune and talks on unspecified issues.

The program had technical problems: the dialogue between the host and the producer could be heard (28.09); when the host spoke, instead of him the static shot of the guest in the studio was broadcasted; when a particular person was presented, several other people from the audience were on camera and it remained uncertain who was being presented.

## **Factor**

The program was aired once a week and offered a variety of discussions to the audience. Monitoring subjects only visited several programs during the reporting period. For example, on September 15, the relevant participants were involved in the program. However, it should be noted that the Deputy Minister of Georgia, then the Minister of Education of Ajara and then education expert Simon Janashia participated in the program. It would be preferred to have backwards sequence as the education expert spoke about the systemic problems of the

innovations that were listed by the government officials. It would be interesting to hear from the government officials the answers to the deficiencies and issues raised by the education expert.

The host's question was often too complicated and included several questions that allowed the respondent to select the desired question and talk about it only. "For the promotion of a healthy lifestyle, it is planned to involve children in diverse types of activities. In which specific activities will children be involved? And do all schools have appropriate infrastructure? Are the schools ready for this novelty?" Asked the journalist and received an answer to only first, simple question and then moved to another prepared question.

On September 29, the leaders of the parties' lists visited the program. Please present yourself to the viewer - this is how the journalist started talking to the candidates who responded by presenting their own biography. It would have been better for the host to conduct prior research and present the guests to the audience on her own. After that the journalist was asking standard questions to everyone – “please underline the main problems” etc. There was an impression that the host was just following the predetermined questions strictly and did not ask follow-up questions that would logically follow the answers. Accordingly, the program was like filling out an application.

### **Kviris Mtavari**

The program has the news format and in some cases the guests are invited to speak about current affairs. The guests were relevant and adequate questions were asked. On October 1, the host of the program was Irina Kurua – Host of the Program “Akhali Sivrtse” and the topic of the program was the new constitution. Unlike “Akhali Sivrtse” the presenter was well-prepared for the discussion with the Chairman of Supreme Council and experts. The talk-show was dynamic and the audience received valuable information and political analysis.

### **Rioni**

At the TV channel Rioni, the talk show “Tema” has been monitored, which is aired twice a week.

### **Tema**

In the beginning of September, the main topic of the program was pre-election environment, where representatives of different parties were invited. Later it was announced that the mayoral

candidates of 12 municipalities of Imereti would be invited to the program. Samtredia, Khobi, Tskaltubo, Vani, Baghdati, Zestaponi, Kharagauli and Tkibuli mayoral candidates visited the program within the monitoring period.

Prior to inviting candidates, guests invited to discuss the election environment were asked the same questions by the host:

- What will you do to solve problems?
- What are your chances, why do you want the voters to trust you?
- How many women do you have on your list or on the majoritarian list?
- Who do you consider as your main competitor?
- List three major problems in Kutaisi.

As a result, the audience could not receive specific information about election programs. The host was not well-prepared for discussions, could not ask counter questions and could not oppose if necessary.

For example, on September 19, a representative of the Alliance of Patriots was asked about the Party Leaders' visit to Russia. "Let's talk about the visit to Russia. The interest of the public is very high and could you please briefly comment on this regard". The guest responded that he "unequivocally positively" evaluated this visit and then asked a rhetorical question: "Our kings did speak with Persian kings and Turk Sultans didn't they, were they the enemies?" Instead of opposing to the respondent, the host said that he could not assess the guest's statement and that he could only listen.

The format of the program changed during the visit of mayoral candidates. The respondents were given equal time to answer the questions, but sometimes this condition was not preserved. Questions were often complex and sometimes combined several questions. It would be better for guests and the audience to focus on one topic, as the viewer would have the opportunity to get specific information. For example, "how would you evaluate three years of service of current self-government? Name three main problems that are priority for you and how do you plan to solve them?" (26.09)

The questions of the host were sometimes very vague, for example, "*Baghdati is a homeland of wine, and nuts. We know the problems related to the nuts ... The problem of nuts and tortoise beetles, which is very disturbing for the population and I have not mentioned the vine in vain. We remember the periods when the population cut vineyards. Do you have a plan to bring our*

*wine to the European market? I know that separate families, etc. have brought their wine to the European market. But you as a local self-government representative and candidate for Baghdati Mayorship what ways will you find in this direction and how will you solve the problem of tortoise beetles in the nearest future? "(28.09)*

On [October 5](#), the host asked the Kharagauli mayoral candidate from the Democratic Movement "Free Georgia": "*Mr. Gia, you expressed your position, your attitude towards the muddy water and blamed the representative of the National Movement. I have such a question: could you tell us without criticizing the opponent what has been achieved during the governance of Georgian Dream, at the local self-government level*"

In the program, the candidates were promising people to solve various problems, such as transforming the city into "the leading city", increasing pensions, but the host did not seek to find out how they plan to do that. The host did not try to oppose the presumably unrealistic promises of candidates, or at least put them under question.

## TV 25

Program "Public Position" [Sazogadoebrivi Positsia] was monitored on TV 25. The program aired twice a week in the beginning and then three times a week. The mayoral candidates of different cities were invited.

### **Public Position**

The program was attended by mayoral candidates of different municipalities and party representatives and they could freely express their opinions and talk about their election promises. The program mostly informed the audience regarding the visions of the candidates. Existing problems were discussed but less focus was on their solution. The host's questions were general and left the impression that he was not properly prepared for the program.

Kakha Tsiskaridze visited the program on [September 19](#). He originally wanted to run independently as Batumi Mayoral candidate and finally ended up running for the party "Georgia for Unity and Development". The host did not ask Tsiskaridze based on what shared values he had chosen to participate in the elections in the name of the given party; whether he had ideological agreement with the party on the most critical issues. The host did not ask any question even after Tsiskaridze mentioned that Batumi Mayor should not be a politician. The host did not even ask a follow-up question after on the initial question about plans to cooperate

with other parties Tsiskaridze responded that he offers the unity to the society and his main stronghold would be Batumi population. How he was going to unite the population remained unclear.

Such superficial discussion was not an exception. On September 15, Batumi mayoral candidate of the Alliance of Patriots promised voters to regulate constructions in Batumi, repair damaged roads, solve wetland settlement problems. The host did not ask specifically how he would do that, whether the party estimated the costs and for how many years had the expenses been calculated. The host asked such a question: "There are other problems in the city as well, you've mentioned poverty. what does your program envisage in this regard?" The journalist should have known in advance what was written in the candidate's program and ask questions based on that knowledge. She should pose follow-up questions bring out facts, arguments and provide information to the audience about how realistic the proposed ways of resolving this problem are. If the candidate does not have a program or the program does not envisage anything on the topic, it is also a valuable information for the audience.

It should be noted that the program individually invited Batumi mayoral candidates and then hosted all of them together on October 6. The discussion was on the same topics which had previously been heard by the audience of TV 25 and therefore no additional information was provided to the voters.

### **Trialeti**

Two programs of TV company Trialeti have been monitored – Different Opinion [Ganskhvavebuli Azri] and Shabatis Studia. The first program envisages discussion with several guests, while the second program offers tet-a-tet interviews with several guests. Both programs are aired once a week and they have the same host.

#### **Different Opinion**

According to the format of the program, several people were invited to talk about the selected topic, including representatives of political parties. The impression is that the program does not have logical development, it is fragmented. The host is not properly prepared; his questions are general and are not fact-based. The host does not ask follow-up questions, does not demand evidence on the allegations voiced by the guests directed at the opponents. Allegations from the opponents are common in the program. As a result, viewers cannot get comprehensive information on discussion topic. For instance, on September 15, in several cases, the program

became the platform for dispute between the Georgian Dream and the National Movement, which was not an exception. The guests did not answer the host's questions, they continued to talk about the topic they were interested in. Hence, the host could not manage the discussions. In the same program, allegations were made against the CEC, but no one attended the program from the election administration. The host was not prepared to ask relevant questions on the issues raised in the program on September 29, such as the problem of water supply in Gori municipality villages, etc. At the end of the same program, the journalist asked the question regarding the allegation coming from the representative of European Georgia. According to him, Gamgebeli built the house for his mother-in-law from the municipality budget, but Gamgebeli denied this fact. There was no research on this conducted by the journalists despite the fact that this case was known prior to the program. It remained unknown whether it really happened, what amount of money was spent on construction of the house of Gamgebeli's mother-in-law and how these funds are linked to the state budget.



## Shabatis Studia

The program was attended by representatives of different parties. The host was not biased. Each guest was asked the broad questions in separate programs. It remained unclear why the guest was not gathered face to face if the critical questions would not be asked to each of them and the program would not have a Hard Talk format. Besides, the channel has significant technical problems, such as unbalanced voice, image etc.

The host's questions were not backed up by the facts and necessary quotations. The host was not prepared to ask critical questions to any of the respondents. For example, when Badri Nanetashvili, the founder of the TV channel, who is now the first number of the list of Development Movement in Gori was the guest of the program, nothing was asked about the information spread in the media that Gori Gamgeoba personnel were present at the presentation of his candidacy and that he was accused of using administrative resources. The host also asked nothing about Nantashvili's ties with the National Movement.

The host's questions were often formulated so vaguely that it was hard to understand the point. For example: "*The elections are ahead, we are in the election period. In two months, there will be self-government elections. What do you think has existing Sakrebulo justified the hopes of the population to raise population's engagement in self-government elections? What do you think, are the self-government elections center-oriented, this is how the voters consider it and they do not hope for special changes?*" (9.09) Respondent answered also that he could not understand the question, or what does "center-oriented" mean.

Instead of critical questions and discussion of election programs, the host was interested in issues such as why the UNM candidate decided to hold the door-to-door meetings with population instead of calling on a large-scale meeting; what are public attitudes in general, with how many mandates the party plans to enter the representative body, etc.

## TV Kvemo Kartli

During the pre-election period, the TV Channel offered the audience the program "Elections 2017", which was aired three times a week.

## Elections 2017

Rustavi, Gardabani, Dmanisi mayoral candidates and candidates for Rustavi Sakrebulo participated in the program. At the beginning of the program, the brief biography of each candidate was presented to the audience. The host was not appropriately prepared to hold discussions on specific topics with the candidates. For example, on September 18, when Rustavi mayoral candidates were arguing over bonuses and city budget, the host did not have information regarding this topic and could not join the discussion. Politicians manipulated with figures, and for the viewer it was not completely clear what amount of money the government had actually spent on the bonuses and was it really about 21 percent of the city budget. The questions were superficial and did not derive from candidates' program (which might not have existed as a document; it remained unknown to the viewer). The host did not have the information about the visions of the guests and was asking them how they planned to solve problems related to healthcare, education, or greenery.

In many cases, the host was unable to manage the debate and did not distribute time properly. For example, on September 20, the controversy between two candidates turned into personal disputes, but the host did not stop use of insulting language by guests. Only in the end the host called for self-restraint. Because of these episodes, other candidates remained in unequal position. This problem was especially apparent on September 27, when the host himself admitted that he could not manage the discussion.

Representative of the Georgian Dream refused to attend several programs. For example, on September 25, when Gardabani mayoral candidates were visiting the program. The host started the program by asking the guests: "What do you think, why the candidate from Georgian Dream has not come to the studio?", This was followed by guesses and "cursing" the candidate from the ruling party. The host gave the competitors the possibility to express their negative attitudes towards the candidate of the Georgian Dream and make allegations in his address, for example call him "election falcificator" and "a useless person."

The sexist attitude strengthening gender stereotypes was demonstrated by the host in two programs. On September 18, the host finished the program with the question: "What field would you trust the women with, Mr. Irakli?" The respondent's reply contained gender stereotypes. He said that women would manage cultural and social directions. The host did not ask the respondent why only these areas could be "trusted" to the women and how was this approach justified. According to the Guidelines of Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics,

media should fight against gender stereotypes and should in no way support them. The material should not strengthen the stereotypes regarding the roles of men and women in a society.

On September 20, the following question was asked: "Our region is entirely populated by ethnic minorities. Many studies show that women are victims of domestic violence. Are you familiar with the problems of female voters and whether you have this envisaged in your pre-election program? "It is unclear why the host linked violence against women to ethnic minorities. Such formulation of question strengthens the stereotype that violence against women is characteristic to ethnic minorities. This may cause negative attitudes towards ethnic Azeri citizens.

### **Channel 9**

On TV Channel 9 the TV program Dialogue was monitored, which was aired once a week from September 21.

#### **Dialogue**

Out of the three programs aired during the reporting period, the monitoring subjects participated in only two programs. Accordingly, the report only relies on these data. The first program was attended by political parties, but only two of the invited guests participated in the program. In the second program, Aspindza and Adigheni mayoral candidates were invited. However, only one of the 5 mayoral candidates from Aspindza took part in the program and only two mayoral candidates participated from Adigheni. The host informed the public regarding this fact.

The host did not ask critical questions, did not elaborate, did not oppose to the candidates who promised to solve all the problems, i.e. increase the pensions; The host did not ask from which pension fund and / or financial sources would candidates plan to do this. One of the candidates said on September 29 that Vale should become a 'Leading City'. It was his answer to the host's question on what were the focus of their election plan. Candidate did not provide more details on how this should be achieved and the host did not ask for more clarification.

### **Guria**

The talk show Tkventan Ertad was not broadcasted regularly on Guria. In August, one TV program was prepared; then the program was cancelled without notifying the viewers that in the nearest future they would not be able to watch the program. From the second half of

September, the program was aired again. In total, during the reporting period, four programs were monitored in which monitoring subjects were involved.

### **Tkventan Ertad**

In the program, the election environment was discussed, and from the second half of September the mayoral candidates were invited. The mayoral candidates of Lanchkhuti and Chokhatauri were visiting the program during the reporting period.

In general, it should be noted that the host was asking broad questions and was not properly prepared.

On August 22, in the welcoming speech the host informed us that the discussion on Human Rights Strategy had been held at the Center for Civic Engagement. Then the host directly presented the guests and started talking to them. From the answers of the guests and the introduction of the presenter it was unclear, what document was discussed, what the strategy contained. Only representatives of the ruling party took part in the program. There was no difference of opinions, alternative views, critical thoughts. The audience only understood that we had significant improvements in human rights, that the government had taken appropriate measures and that the prepared strategic document on human rights was good. The host did not oppose.e.

In addition, it is interesting to note that when this TV program made a talk show on human rights strategy, quite interesting processes were developing in the region of Guria - the Governor resigned and the official introduction of the new Governor to the public was scheduled on August 23rd, the following day of the program. Possibly, this issue would be more relevant for the target audience of the channel rather than the discussion of human rights strategy held in the Center for Democratic Engagement.

As for the program with participation of the candidates, in the beginning of the program with Lanchkhuti mayoral candidates, the host asked all guests to present their election programs. They started talking about the problems, the host interrupted and requested that they discuss their programs. It would be better for the host to be prepared, to read the election programs of the candidates and ask relevant questions concerning the program. The guests were talking simultaneously, interrupting each other, moving from one topic to another, accusing each other and sometimes it was unclear what was the dispute about. The host could not lead the debate and only used the phrases like "Please", "Could you let him finish his words", "Please don't

interrupt" This had no results. The host actually did not ask any questions to the respondents, accordingly the voters did not receive valuable information ([29.09](#)).

From the Chokhatauri mayoral candidates, only the candidate of ruling party participated in the program. Other candidates did not show up and the host informed the audience regarding this. Even in the interview format, the questions of the presenter were broad. The program started again with the host's request to the candidate to talk about his own program, yet the candidate started talking about the activities carried out the ruling party and their plans. The questions that were asked by the presenter did not derive logically from the answers of the respondent. The host followed only the preliminary prepared questions, and not only did not oppose to the guest, but did not even ask follow-up questions.