

Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development

The Institute for War and Peace Reporting

NEWSPAPERS OUTSIDE THE CAPITAL:

How International Assistance Influenced Print Media in Georgia's Regions

Funded by the European Commission

The Georgia Regional Media Development
and Public Accountability Project

Tbilisi
2007

გაზეთები დედაქალაქის გარეთ: რა ზემოქმედება მოახდინა საერთაშორისო დახმარებამ ზეჭდვით მედიაზე საქართველოს რეგიონებში

მშვიდობის, დემოკრატიის და განვითარების კავკასიური ინსტიტუტი,
თბილისი, 2007

© მშვიდობის, დემოკრატიის და განვითარების კავკასიური ინსტიტუტი

ISBN 978-99928-37-07-8

*Newspapers outside the Capital: How International Assistance
Influenced Print Media in Georgia's Regions*

Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development,
Tbilisi, 2007

© Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development

1 M. Aleksidze Str., Tbilisi 0193 Georgia
Tel: 334081; Fax: 334163
www.cipdd.org

CONTENTS

Main findings of the study	5
1. Ajaria	14
2. Imereti	30
3. Kakheti	46
4. Samtskhe-Javakheti	61
5. Shida Kartli	76
6. Kvemo Kartli and Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti	92
7. Main findings of the comparative study	117

Appendix

Social, economic and political aspects of regional media development in Georgia 28 February – 1 March 2007	120
--	-----

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development in partnership with the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* launched the third phase of research of the development of the Georgian regional media in December 2005. The study was conducted under the *Regional Media Development and Public Accountability* project. The goal of the first two phases of the project was to describe and analyze the general picture of the Georgian regional media, which resulted in publishing by the *Caucasus Institute of Georgia's Regional Media Map*. The objective of the third phase was to measure the effect of the activities which the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* carried out in cooperation with the newspapers that were selected for the project.

As early as 2004, the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* selected four regional newspapers for the purpose of development of the capabilities of the local print media under the *Development of the Regional Media in Georgia and Public Accountability* project: the *Spektri* newspaper (town of Gurjaani in Kakheti region), the *Akhali Gazeti* newspaper (city of Kutaisi in Imereti), the *Khalkhis Gazeti* newspaper (town of Gori, Shida Kartli), and the *Gazeti Batumelebi* newspaper (city of Batumi, Abkhazeti). The *Samkhetis Karibche* newspaper was founded under the project in the Samegrelo-Zemchkhvatskhe region with the Georgian-language and Armenian-language editorial offices in Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki, respectively.

The goal of the *Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development* at this phase of the project was to monitor the aforementioned newspapers and demonstrate the effects on their development of the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting's* activities. The study was conducted by Malkhaz Saldadze, Giorgi Shubitidze and Merab Tsindeliiani. The editor of the Georgian text of the report is Zeinab Saradze.

The efforts of the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* sought to support and develop the following aspects of operation of the local newspapers:

- Ensuring structural stability through improvement of managerial skills and sharing of expert knowledge on fine-tuning of the organizational structure;
- Ensuring economic stability of the newspapers by strengthening the skill of marketing policy planning on the one hand and providing financial and technical support on the other;
- Improving the quality of the newspapers through professional development and improvement of skills of their journalists.

The research team of the *Caucasus Institute of Peace, Democracy and Development* used the following criteria in measuring the effects of the activities which the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* carried out for this purpose:

- The general picture of the media development in the given region and the place and role of the newspaper which participated in the project in the region's public life;
- The organizational development level of the newspapers which participated in the project and its effects on the quality of media products;
- Compliance with public demands of the editorial policy which the newspapers that participated in the project formulated after receiving expert assistance;
- Influence of the newspapers that participated in the project on the development of the local media sector.

For the purpose of studying the development dynamic, research in the target regions was conducted in two phases. The methodological approach to the measurement of the aforementioned effects included the following techniques:

- Focus group discussions with participation of readers of the papers that participated in the project and other local papers;
- Detailed interviews with the main local groups which were interested in the local papers (nongovernmental organizations, local officials);
- Observation of the functioning of the papers' organizational structure (interviews with the papers' journalistic, editorial, and managerial staff).

The study was conducted not only in those regions where the newspapers that were selected by the *Institute for War and Peace Re-*

porting operated, but also in the regions where no activities aimed at the development of the local media were carried out under this project. These include Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti and Kvemo Kartli, where Zugdidi, Poti, Senaki, Marneuli and Gardabani were the target towns. The goal of the studies that were conducted there was to establish the difference in the development level, using the aforementioned criteria, between the media organizations which received financial, technical and expert support from the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* under the *Development of the Regional Media in Georgia and Public Accountability* project and other local print media organizations. The conclusions and differences that were found by the study are described in the chapters below.

At the final stage of the study, a discussion was held *On social, economic and political aspects of functioning of the Georgian regional press*. The goal of the discussion was to highlight the trends of the regional media development in general and discuss the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting's* contribution in particular. Leading Georgian media experts and representatives of the organizations which participated in the *Georgia Regional Media Development and Public Accountability* project took part in the discussion. The main topics of the discussion included the following issues:

- The media and the public
- The media and the state
- The media and the economy
- The role of international and donor organizations in the development of the Georgian regional media

Materials from the discussion are attached to this report.

Main findings of the study:

The study has revealed the following picture of the aforementioned aspects of the development of the local newspapers:

1. Ajaria:¹ The *Gazeti Batumelebi* newspaper

- Against the backdrop of the current grave situation of the independent print media in the region, the paper has managed to win public trust and recognizability.

¹ The third phase of research was conducted in the Autonomous Republic of Ajaria on 11-16 September 2005 and 9-13 September 2006.

- The experience of planning the editorial policy, which was acquired in 2005-2006, and the strengthening of the norms of journalistic ethics with the help of training courses has improved the paper's content, which the local reading public views as a positive development and which increases public trust in the newspaper.
- Against the backdrop of public trust, the paper has become a reliable source of information and analysis. It is actively playing the role of a mediator between social groups and the authorities in the region's public life. The awareness campaigns that it organizes usually result in broad public involvement and the local authorities' reaction. The newspaper is actively performing the function of a tribune for the non-governmental sector, which for its part has a positive effect on the development of democracy in the region.
- The paper's internal structure has improved as a result of expert support. Editorial and managerial functions are separated, journalists' workload is divided into areas of competence, and journalists have become experts in their respective areas.
- The paper's sales have grown noticeably in 2005-2006 (the distribution network has outgrown the city of Batumi to include all the districts in Ajaria). Its circulation exceeds 3,000, but it is issued at the same intervals as before.
- As a result of the improved marketing and advertising policy, the paper's revenues from commercial advertising exceed the sales revenues.
- The paper has managed to mobilize its revenues, save money from technical and financial assistance from its donors and the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, and buy its own office.

2. Imereti:² The *Akbali Gazeti* newspaper

- Against the backdrop of stiff competition among the media sources in the region and especially in its administrative cen-

² The third phase of research was conducted in Imereti region on 9-15 April 2005 and 16-18 April 2006

tre, the paper has managed, with technical and expert support of the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, to achieve organizational stability and establish itself among local media sources. The fact that the newspaper is one of the leading media organizations in terms of public trust testifies to this. In this respect, it is even ahead of the electronic media.

- Following the training courses and seminars that were held in 2005-2006, editorial and managerial functions were separated and the journalists' workload was divided according to topics and areas of competence. This had a direct effect on the paper's content. The pages were assigned to topics, and analytical and purely informative sections were separated. The better balance of reporting can be considered a major achievement of the paper and its partner, the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*.
- The paper closely works with representatives of the region's nongovernmental sector and social groups. It is equally accessible to all interested sides. This increases its informative capacity and bolsters its reputation of an impartial mediator in the eyes of the local public. The demand grows as a result, and accordingly grows the paper's circulation. If at the time of founding the newspaper, its circulation was 700 and in 2005 – 1,000, in late 2006 it reached 1,800. Another reason for growing circulation is that the paper's products are distributed in almost all districts of the Imereti region at present.
- The paper is functioning in a fiercely competitive environment; it has to vie with other media sources in Imereti for the advertising market which is small already. Although there is more commercial advertising in the newspaper now, advertising revenues still cannot exceed sales revenues. The paper is successful at present at attracting social advertising.

3. Kakheti:³ The *Spektri* newspaper

- Compared to other newspapers which took part in the project,

³ The third phase of research was conducted in Kakheti region on 11-15 July 2005 and 8-10 May 2006.

Spektri is more competitive. Traditionally, the print media are well-developed in Gurjaani district. Unfortunately, the same assertion does not apply to other districts of the region. The paper's managerial policy was from the very outset aimed at taking over the region's media market. Owing to the lack of serious rivals, the paper was successful in achieving this goal. As a result of managerial, editorial and journalistic training courses, *Spektri's* sales in 2005-2006 increased by 30% in the town of Gurjaani;

- Similar to other newspapers involved in the project, the development of *Spektri's* content was from the very outset aimed at meeting the readership's demands and winning public trust for the paper's products. This has translated into the increase in the paper's circulation. If before the involvement in the project, *Spektri's* circulation was 1,000, now it fluctuates between 1,500 and 2,000. Its page count also rose from 12 to 16;
- Like *Akhali Gazeti*, *Spektri* too finds it hard to attract advertisers because the local advertising market is underdeveloped. This is why the paper has started to work on attracting social advertising and achieved some success too, but revenues from non-commercial advertising are not sufficient to keep the paper self-sustainable. At present, the paper's management is working on the improvement of a region-wide distribution network.

The paper closely cooperates with different nongovernmental organizations operating at the regional level, both in the area of information exchange and by providing newspaper space to them. *Spektri* offers human rights and other civil society groups a wide public space for information distribution. This underscores *Spektri's* role in the region.

4. Samtkhe-Javakheti:⁴ The *Samkhetis Karibche* newspaper

- In contrast to other newspapers, which were involved in the project, the *Samkhetis Karibche* newspaper enjoyed much more

⁴ The third phase of research was conducted in Samtkhe-Javakheti region on 24-30 July 2005 and 10-14 August 2006.

favourable conditions for operation and development. Against the backdrop of the low level of media development in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region and the weak economic situation, expert, financial and technical assistance from the donor organization put the paper in an advantageous position compared to other media sources. Accordingly, *Samkhetis Karibche* had more growth and development opportunities, on which the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* very effectively concentrated its efforts. At present, the paper can be considered the region's only successful print media source.

- *Samkhetis Karibche* was founded from the scratch, on a green field. The paper is not a result of the development of some pre-existing infrastructure. This puts it in a favourable position compared to other newspapers. The point is that the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, as a member of the founding coalition, took an active part in finding qualified people with professional skills. As a result, the proactive part of the region's civil society was mobilized.
- Because of the proper planning of its editorial and managerial policy, the paper drew the local public's attention as early as 2004 and became recognizable. The paper managed to dispel the social stereotype which had already established itself by then that there are political interests of some individuals or social groups behind the region's independent media. From this point of view, the paper's management and their partner, the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, had to do a particularly difficult job in the region, where the paper's trilingual editorial office was founded. The paper eventually proved that it was impartial, and won a high degree of trust among the local public (both in ethnic Georgian and ethnic Armenian communities).
- The content was planned in active consultations with the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* and its partners, especially the *24 Saati* newspaper. As a result, the paper's products became interesting and attractive for the local readership, whose representatives noted during focus group discussions that *Samkhetis Karibche* is deemed more reliable when cover-

ing regional developments than central media sources.

- Public interests and demands are taken into account when planning the editorial policy. This is why the trust level indicator has increased, which has a positive effect on the paper's circulation. If at the time of founding (in 2004), the paper's Georgian-language and Armenian-language editions' combined circulation was 1,000, now it is 2,000.
- The paper closely cooperates with representatives of the non-governmental sector organizations operating in the region and local political groups. It is an equally accessible tribune to all interested sides. The paper enjoys equal trust both in ethnic Georgian and ethnic Armenian communities. Accordingly, its role in ensuring political participation is great.

5. **Shida Kartli:**⁵ the *Khalkbis Gazeti* newspaper

- The main criterion in selecting the newspaper was the pressing nature of regional problems (Shida Kartli is the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone). Its resources were limited because of the weakness of the local media sector. Accordingly, the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* decided to make expanding the paper's resources the priority of its cooperation with *Khalkbis Gazeti*. A whole series of training courses were conducted to extend the paper's journalistic potential, plan thematic work and improve the equipment base. Because the paper, in contrast to other newspapers involved in the project, did not have a proper equipment base, technical assistance from the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* turned out to be insufficient. In addition, the paper encountered the problem of keeping its trained journalistic staff, whose regular rotation seriously hampered the process of improving the paper's content despite the resources that were invested in the paper's development.
- Efforts to develop management improved the paper's technical aspects. The page count rose, and pages became structured by subject. The print quality and design were improved.

⁵ The third phase of research was conducted in Shida Kartli region on 23-27 March 2005 and 15-16 December 2005

Unfortunately, the paper's management failed to find commercial advertisers, which would ensure the paper's financial stability. From this point of view, the page of paid-for classified ads proved more profitable.

- Despite difficulties, the paper won support of some of the readership in the region's administrative centre and nearby villages, which, besides the personal acquaintance with the paper's editor, was accounted for by the change in the paper's quality.
- The paper closely cooperates with representatives of the local nongovernmental sector and provides an impartial tribunal for them. By doing so, the paper helps structure the local public discourse against the backdrop of the extremely secretive local administration.

1. AJARIA

1. 1 The state of the free media and their role in the region's public life

1.1.1 Media development overview

The situation of the free media in the Autonomous Republic of Ajaria is not particularly enviable. The majority of those local media sources which carry out their activities without hindrance are state-owned. Because of their economic and financial instability, the independent media organizations are struggling to supply their product to the readers. They cannot even manage to reach all the strata of society. Studies show that *Gazeti Batumelebi* and *Achara PS* are exceptions in this respect.

The current state of the free media in the region should not come as a surprise given the situation in which the free media have been developing. From the economic standpoint, it was difficult for them to compete with state-owned organizations, e.g. the *Achara* TV company and *Achara* newspaper. At the same time they had to function under permanent political pressure. Although after the revolution the second factor was removed, it still proved to be difficult for the free media to survive as organizations in the conditions of competition with the state-owned media sources. Regular recipients of funding from the republic's budget, the latter are not subject to the same type of commotions as are the free media. It is difficult for them to maintain:

- Sustainable circulation (in case of the print media);
- Periodicity (in case of the print media);
- Professional staff (which is often the cause for all other problems of a media source);
- audience (which loses trust in the periodical because of impossibility to publish it periodically or because of the media product being unavailable).

A typical example of this situation is independent TV company 25 *Arkbi*, which after the May 2004 revolution in Ajaria found itself faced with acute financial problems (before the revolution, it was

financed by the Government of the Autonomous Republic of Ajaria). The onset of economic instability forced some of the journalists and technical personnel of the TV company to move to the *Achara* company, which resulted in the closure of a large number of the 25 *Arkebi* programmes. The privatization of the building where the TV company had its office came on top of these problems. At present, 25 *Arkebi*'s work is limited to entertainment programmes and brief news bulletins.

The free media experiencing the aforementioned problems are either left dependent on assistance from the authorities or business groups with political interests, which reduces the level of their independence, or are managing to keep working by taking part in projects funded by international and donor organizations. Here too, not all media sources are in equal starting positions. Donor organizations' selection criteria for cooperation with the media (in our case, with the print media) include:

- Stable organizational structure and professional journalistic staff;
- Quality of the media product (from the point of view of analytical content and ethical values);
- Stable circulation (with growing indicators) and periodicity;
- Public recognition and trust of the media product.

Of course, not all newspapers meet these criteria. In Ajaria, the *Gazeti Batumelebi* newspaper commands trust of donors. (Frequency of its participation in projects attests to this, too.)

1.1.2 Channels of informing the public and the media

Research has outlined the following list of priority sources of obtaining information in terms of reliability and efficiency:

1. The *Achara* TV company
2. The *Gazeti Batumelebi* newspaper
3. The *Achara* newspaper
4. The 25 *Arkebi* TV company
5. The *Achara PS* newspaper

Despite positive assessments of efficiency and reliability of information delivery by the existing media sources, the public trusts informal information sources as well. Some respondents noted that

frequently circulating rumours and information emanating from local government corridors generate great interest and are considered quite reliable. They take particular interest in information on corruption, abuse of power and illegal business practices. In customers' opinion, the media coverage of these issues is low.

In addition to the local media, the nationwide media are also identified as sources of information. Of these, the local public gives greater preference to the electronic media (*Rustavi-2* and *Imedi* TV companies, and *Imedi*, *Fortuna*, *Mtsvane Talgha*, *Radio Liberty* radio stations) compared to the print ones. Local readers receive information on the developments in the country mainly from the newspapers and magazines published in Tbilisi (*Kviris Palitra*, *Akballi Versia*, *24 Saati*, *Alia*, *Rezonansi* newspapers), but they trust their articles on Ajaria to a lesser extent.

When discussing the local media, respondents noted that television and press reports largely coincide. The difference between these two media is that the electronic media are more factual and less analytical, whereas newspapers discuss individual problems in greater depth. Thus the local television is a higher priority due to its faster news delivery and immediate availability, but the demand for newspapers is not any less because there is more analysis and more profound presentation of problems there. According to respondents, if TV coverage is not full and satisfactory, the deficit is made up for by local newspapers.

To what extent media sources are trusted and what assessments are given to the extent of freedom of speech in them is to a certain extent determined by the form of ownership of media organizations (whether they are state-owned or private) and their relations with the local authorities. Despite the fact that the *Achara* newspaper is one of the main sources of information, it is much less trusted than the independent print media. The level of trust in the independent newspapers is also gauged by the history of their relations with the authorities. It follows that public trust in the *Gazeti Batumelebi* newspaper is greater compared to other independent periodicals. The latter are thought to have cooperated with the Abashidze regime before the May [2004] revolution in Ajaria, and accordingly, are less trusted. The level of trust in the newspaper is also predicated on how balanced its

reporting is. Diversity of opinions on the specific issue and journalistic impartiality form the basis for the local readership's trust. Here too the majority of respondents give preference to the *Gazeti Batumelebi* newspaper. All interested sides equally take part in discussions that are held on the paper's pages. Another criterion of demand for the newspaper is convincing analytical content. From this point of view as well, local readers voted greater confidence in *Gazeti Batumelebi* than other print media.

As some local respondents explained, the low level of trust in the local government and state institutions creates a watershed between the so-called "positionist" [pro-government] and "oppositionist" press. We should also take into account here that this sort of dividing line among the local media sources is mostly based on local readership's attitudes and perceptions. In the opinion of a small proportion of respondents, newspapers' tone and content have to be more aggressive toward and critical of the local authorities. But to a larger number of respondents, a newspaper's balanced position in covering current developments is much more acceptable. They say that radical politicization will only weaken their interest in the media. From this point of view too, the majority of respondents give their preference to *Gazeti Batumelebi* from among the existing media sources.

1.1.3 Free media and public expectations

The conducted research shows that the public takes particularly keen interest in the ecology and ecological migration issues. Furthermore, they are interested in the authorities' policy regarding these issues. A cascade of hydroelectric power stations is being built in the Chorokhi River valley in the Republic of Turkey, which might result in quite negative consequences for Ajaria. A lively discussion is under way on this issue in the Ajarian media, and notably in the *Gazeti Batumelebi* newspaper. Readers give a positive assessment to the journalists' activities in this direction. However, they maintain that representatives of the press should put forth even greater efforts to cover the imminent aggravation of the ecological situation in Ajaria.

According to an opinion poll conducted among the readership, the majority of the local media are inconsistent or passive in cov-

ering some issues. A newspaper or an electronic medium might turn their attention to an issue which is of interest for the public, but then omit reporting on the authorities' attitude toward the issue or on the measures which the authorities have taken to address it. As regards reporting on the same environmental issues, the public is regularly informed on landslides and their results in the mountainous regions of Ajaria, but after that, the public does not know whether or not the authorities carried out programmes to assist the victims. In addition, the media seldom provide assessments of whether or not the government money is spent appropriately. This complaint particularly refers to the electronic media and is almost irrelevant to some print media organizations.

Research has revealed other demands from and expectations for the media, which include the following aspects:

- Independent newspapers should be more critical when reporting on the authorities' economic policy and especially on social programmes;
- State-owned media sources should operate in a more respectable manner; they ought to demonstrate greater competence when reporting on different issues, they should not discuss current developments with the eye to the local authorities' interests, and should not avoid pressing issues of the day;
- There is a need for more work to improve journalists' professional skills; a more refined set of ethical norms has to be introduced in their work. The level of public trust in some independent periodicals is low because their bias and loyal attitude toward particular political and economic interest groups is clearly noticeable;
- More attention needs to be paid to social, economic, and environmental problems of Ajaria's agrarian zone, especially those of the mountainous areas;
- More attention needs to be paid to youth problems. Issues of child and adolescent crime, drug addiction, and prostitution should be covered extensively. The public wants to know more about trafficking in humans. It would be good if investigative journalism established itself in the local media on all the abovementioned issues;

- There is a need for a more professional reporting on economic developments in the region and activities of the local administration, for monitoring and evaluation of the results of the ongoing reforms, for public oversight of the law enforcement bodies' activities through journalistic investigations.

Research has also drawn an interesting picture as far as the coverage of religious issues is concerned. The opinions on this issue are split in two: to one group, paying more attention to religious issues by the media is desirable, whereas to the second group, focusing the media's attention on religious issues in a religiously diverse region is politically incorrect.

Respondents also noted the need to found a youth newspaper which would express the interests of that stratum of society and report on their problems.

Public interest in the political processes which are under way in the autonomous republic is great, but the work of the substantial part of the local media in this exceedingly important sphere of public life is appraised as unsatisfactory. The media do not pay much attention to the work of the autonomous republic's Supreme Council and activities of local political parties and the nongovernmental sector. However, it should also be taken into account that neither political parties nor representatives of civil society are trying particularly hard to gain publicity and introduce themselves to the public. They do not have a clearly formulated public relations policy either, and mostly limit themselves to making statements on scandalous issues.

1.1.4 Media and the authorities

In many respects, relations between these sectors have changed after the revolution, for example, intimidation of journalists, physical pressure on them or offences to their dignity no longer take place. The authorities' attitude toward the media is not based on the selective principle any more, although neither can it be said that the authorities are fully open to the journalists. Although compared to the pre-revolution times public information is more readily available, the procedures involved in obtaining public information often get

dragged out and releasing of the information of certain types (for example, on privatization of large state-owned facilities or investments into the economic infrastructure) is hindered.

Making a full use of the advertising market remains a problem for the independent media. The state-owned media create an unequal competitive environment for the independent media with economic, human and administrative resources which they obtain with the state's help. They have more opportunities to win a greater share of the audience. (In the electronic media's case, these include a wide broadcast reception area, in the print media's case – high circulation and periodicity.) Accordingly, advertising companies use their services more often. In the print media's case, competitiveness according to the form of ownership is also affected by the fact that the state-owned media can distribute their product and get subscribers without any financial expenses by using local authorities' agencies, whereas the independent newspapers have to create and develop their own distribution mechanisms, which translates into associated expenses and weakens their already fragile economic basis.

1.2 *Gazeti Batumelebi* newspaper

1.2.1 Cooperation with international donor organizations and organizational development of the *Gazeti Batumelebi* newspaper

With help from donor organizations and its main partner, the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, the newspaper underwent major positive changes in 2005. The main development priority for the paper's management was organizational development, which first and foremost manifested itself in fine-tuning of the management and marketing policy. The newspaper's advertising service has become more active. The service was launched as a separate department (with the staff of two persons) after the 2005 training conducted by the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*. The purpose of the paper's advertising service is maintaining relations with the local business sector on a regular basis and providing advertising services to it. This has noticeably increased the paper's revenues from advertising.

The goal of the training conducted by the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* was formulating the right advertising policy, which included the following objectives:

- Identifying business actors who are interested in newspaper advertising;
- Planning PR policy in a way that would make the newspaper's recognizability a tool of attracting advertising;
- Improving advertising technologies and design to boost both advertising customers' and readership's interest in the newspaper's advertising products.

Through the partnership with the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, close contacts were established with Tbilisi's *24 Saati* newspaper, whose editor helped the *Gazeti Batumelebi* newspaper, as well as other media sources involved in the project, improve their editorial policy and management. To improve management, the newspaper underwent training in designing business plans and building distribution network for its products, and received counselling on how to design classifieds and an advertisement supplement and how to choose design. In addition to the training provided by the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, *Gazeti Batumelebi* also underwent management training courses in cooperation with IREX.

Gazeti Batumelebi's progress is first and foremost manifested in its growing circulation. Before the revolution, it fluctuated between 2,600 and 2,700, of which 1,600 were subscriptions. After the May 2004 Batumi revolution, with changes in the political situation, public interest toward the paper also changed – in other words, it flagged, reducing the paper's circulation to 2,400. But improvements in the paper's management yielded results. The revenues from the advertising service exceeded the newspaper sales revenues already in 2005. This policy enabled *Gazeti Batumelebi's* management to consider a region-wide distribution of the paper. To expand to Kobuleti, Khelvachauri, Kedi, and Khulo districts, the process of creating the paper's own distribution network was started. Although the reach of the paper in the districts of the Autonomous Republic of Ajaria, and especially in the mountainous districts, lags far behind its indicators in Batumi, the aforementioned policy did influence the paper's circulation, and in 2005 *Gazeti Batumelebi's* circulation reached 3,000.

Cooperation between *Gazeti Batumelebi* and the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* was from the outset aimed at improving the quality. In 2005, the paper's journalists attended a number of training courses, whose goal was improving analytical skills. The relevance and priority of this area stemmed from the fact that, due to its periodicity (the newspaper is a weekly), the paper was unable to work directly in the news field and had to provide analytical coverage of the issues that were of interest to the public. This, of course, does not mean that the paper's editorial policy ignores the importance of timely news delivery. The news is regularly and promptly published on the paper's web page. Of course, it would be hard to give an estimate of how broad the *Gazeti Batumelebi's* news audience is, but the majority of respondents who participated in focus group discussions and who had Internet access do trust reports on the *Gazeti Batumelebi's* web page and are its regular visitors.

Expert support from the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* implied refining *Gazeti Batumelebi's* editorial policy as well. The editorial policy has become selective in choosing topics to cover in the paper. Although a lot of material accumulates during the week, the editorial office chooses articles on the basis of their relevance to the pressing issues of the day and logical interconnections. One of the criteria for selecting an article for print is the quality of the analysis. The editorial office may return the article to the author and ask her to improve it. This does not happen on the basis of single-handed decision, though. This is decided at weekly meetings of the editorial and journalistic staff. This approach improves the quality of the paper's products, and accordingly, dependence of the local readership on the paper also grows. The paper's quality accounts for reliance of the Georgian central media precisely on this paper when they report on Ajaria's problems. There have been numerous occurrences when the nationwide electronic and print media produced a TV report or an article based on *Gazeti Batumelebi's* reports or resorted to the paper's editorial office and journalists for advice.

To monitor the quality of their own media products, the paper's editorial and managerial teams are monitoring the product quality of other Ajarian media sources and compare it with their own. As a result of this approach, the paper discontinued its work on op-ed

and educational pages, which are particularly characteristic of the state-owned media. The pages of those newspapers abound with articles on literature, history and religion. The *Gazeti Batumelebi's* editorial office renounced the style that has established itself in the regional independent media, which is manifested in scandal-tinged reports and catchy headlines.

The activities that were carried out in 2005 together with donors, and first and foremost with the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, were mainly aimed at improving the paper's management. Despite this, some organizational problems remained unresolved that year, such as:

- Efficient staff time management and workload distribution. For example, the editorial team and journalists did not work full days for several days of the week, but had to work all but round the clock for a few days before the issue was printed;
- Coming late for work was frequent; this became rare after the introduction of fines for being late;
- During summer holidays, a small number of the staff dealt with most of the workload. In these conditions, quality control was difficult to undertake;
- With increase in advertising orders, the number of pages had to increase too. Initially, it was decided not to add extra pages. (The editorial office started to look for an office space to buy, which later became possible with support from the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* and the *Open Society Institute*.) This reduced the amount of journalistic work, but produced a positive result as well. The editorial office decided not to cover less pressing issues any more and made the criteria for the selection of articles for publication more strict and sophisticated, which raised the quality of the paper's content.

In 2006, there were no major changes in the management and editorial policy. Developing the professional skills of *Gazeti Batumelebi's* journalists became the main focus of cooperation with the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*. The paper's editorial office started to attract other partners as well for this purpose. For instance, Belarusian experts and Georgian trainers were invited with IREX support, who helped *Gazeti Batumelebi's* journalists develop

practical skills and expand their theoretical knowledge. With assistance from the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, it also became possible to raise the journalistic level of the paper's correspondents in the districts. The professional level of the paper's five correspondents who work in Ajaria's districts increased noticeably after these training courses. In cooperation with the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* it became possible in 2006 to increase the paper's page count by adding business and medical supplements. One of the paper's journalists attended training courses in reporting on medical issues and minorities' rights.

Gazeti Batumelebi's journalists attended the following series of training courses to improve their professional skills and qualification:

- Reporting on local elections, political participation, and economic issues
- Journalistic ethics
- Investigative journalism
- Professional standards
- Extreme journalism techniques

Close cooperation of the paper's editorial office with the *Georgian Institute of Public Affairs* (where two of the paper's journalists are undergoing a course of journalistic education), whose expertise was actively used in planning and holding training courses for the journalists, has played a great role in this.

In addition to technical and expert assistance of the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, the paper maintained relations with other international organizations as well. It took part in the following activities:

- A project of retraining journalists from western Georgia was carried out with help from the *Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)* to establish the norms of journalistic ethics when conducting free debates;
- In late 2005, *Gazeti Batumelebi* with help of the *Konrad Adenauer Foundation* held a conference on problems in the media, which resulted in the publication of a booklet;
- With the *European Commission's* support, a project of reporting on ecomigrants' problems was funded.

Staff training and development has a positive effect both on the paper's content and on sales and attractiveness for advertisers. But

in a certain sense, it has a counter-effect as well: professional staff finds more attractive employment opportunities in the job market, and it becomes difficult for the paper to keep trained and experienced staff. The problem that *Gazeti Batumelebi's* editorial office encounters is that newly hired journalists should meet the criteria of the editorial policy and maintain the quality of *Gazeti Batumelebi's* content. The *Free Journalists House*, which was founded by the paper with the goal of developing Batumi's journalistic resources, should be seen as a step toward resolving this problem. Students from Batumi State University's journalism faculty work as interns at the *Free Journalists House* and gain hands-on experience both in newspaper and TV journalism. Young journalists started to issue *Auditorium 51*, *Gazeti Batumelebi's* youth supplement, which is a biweekly. This activity enables *Gazeti Batumelebi* to attract experienced and professional staff when needed.

The paper's technical infrastructure has also benefited from cooperation with the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* and relations with other donors. The quality of *Gazeti Batumelebi's* products and its capabilities have improved. During the period of cooperation with the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, one computer, two dictation machines, one photographic camera, and one diesel generator were handed over to the paper. In addition, the same donor organization also financed the salaries of the newspaper staff. Two computers were handed over to the paper's editorial office as part of a project funded by *Open Society – Georgia Foundation*. In addition to the equipment received from the donors, the newspaper has seven computers, two printers, one copier, two scanners, and ten dictation machines.

The newspaper has 18 staff members: the chief editor, deputy chief editor, manager, two advertising agents, two technical personnel, one designer, one bookkeeper, and nine journalists (of which five are the paper's correspondents in districts).

1.2.2 Conformity of *Gazeti Batumelebi's* editorial policy with public demands

The paper's editorial policy ensures that all the articles that are published in the paper take into account readers' expectations and

demands to the fullest extent. This is why the entire editorial staff gather the day after the issue is printed and discuss what topics should be covered in the next issue with consideration of their social significance and the public interest that they generate. Then the issues are divided between journalists according to each journalist's sphere of competence. If the editor makes some important changes to an article before the publication of an issue, he/she does this with the author's agreement. As surveyed journalists noted, with strengthening of professional skills these occurrences are becoming rarer. By adhering to procedures of this type the editorial office is trying to prevent journalistic work from departing from public demand and make it interesting for the reader.

Respondents who were interviewed during focus group discussions gave a positive assessment to the paper's style and slant of topic coverage and identified their increasingly balanced nature as a particularly notable achievement. However, they went on to voice an opinion that the coverage of some issues lacked in-depth analysis. This, in some of the respondents' assessment, is accounted for by lack of professionalism among journalists, non-disclosure of information by public institutions or failure to take into account public interest by government agencies. Many respondents attribute lack of analysis to a specific nature of work of government agencies.

Despite the fact that the television is a more reliable information medium in terms of news delivery, *Gazeti Batumelebi*, in respondents' opinion, is the source of information which the public trusts. Participants in focus group discussions underscored the paper's good reputation which has been established over the years and which still plays an important role in molding attitudes toward the paper. One of the respondents said: "It is interesting for me how the same information is reported in [...] newspaper and in *Gazeti Batumelebi*. I always find that *Gazeti Batumelebi* has discerned different nuances or discussed the issue in greater depth. This is why I believe this newspaper is more interesting and trustworthy."

According to another respondent, who is a representative of the local authorities, "in contrast to the television or [...] newspaper, the information in *Gazeti Batumelebi* is more accurate and does not aim to be either scandalous or ingratiating to anyone."

So, *Gazeti Batumelebi* is in greater demand among the participating respondents than are the products of other media. At the same time, readers commented on flaws in the paper's work, mostly of technical nature, such as, for example, its linguistic style, design, and the quality of photographs in the paper. One of the loyal readers said: "I would prefer that the paper had a good design and was published two or three times a week instead of once."

It was noted during the focus group discussion that, if before the revolution, the newspaper was mainly poised to report on politics and excesses by the local authorities, which gained it somewhat of an image of an opposition newspaper, after the revolution social and economic topics were added to the political reporting, making the paper more balanced:

"If before the revolution, the public read the paper because it was openly oppositionist, now it is read because the paper is clearly impartial and fits into certain legal limits. If we look at recent articles, the paper is absolutely in order, say, with respect to the same codes. The authors double-check all the information for legality. There are countless examples of this."

Preference for the newspaper is made greater by the fact that in contrast to other local media, the paper started to report on the socio-economic, environmental, demographic problems of the mountainous districts of Ajaria instead of publishing reviews of its culture and ethnography.

1.2.3 *Gazeti Batumelebi's* role in the region's public life

Gazeti Batumelebi sobers and controls the authorities by reporting on the pressing problems of local society. Both before and after the revolution, newspaper articles on political, economic, and social issues are invariably followed by reaction of government officials whose importance is proportional to the importance of the issue in question. The authorities often sue the paper's editorial office. The paper's editor said that often the reason for litigation was not so much the acuteness of the issue as mistakes that were made when obtaining information or citing its source, of which the authorities successfully used to take advantage. As the editors and journalists become more

professional, the newspaper manages to keep its published information, its sources, and methods of obtaining it in line with the current Georgian regulations. This is why the authorities have fewer reasons to sue the paper, which is why there has not been a single litigation case against the paper in 2006.

As a result of refinement of the editorial policy and a more balanced reporting, the paper does not encounter any more problems when covering issues like the elections, corruption, political parties, and flaws in the local authorities' work. *Gazeti Batumelebi* gives equal opportunity to all parties involved in problems it reports on to express their opinion and supply answers to questions that arise among the public. In this regard, it indeed plays the role of a mediator among the public, the authorities, and economic actors.

In addition, *Gazeti Batumelebi* conducts different awareness campaigns on important issues of public life. One of the most important recent events was *Society Against Drug Addiction*, which included different types of activities, ranging from newspaper articles and TV reports to the distribution of information bulletins among the local population. This event turned out to be quite consequential. Open screening by *Gazeti Batumelebi* of the documentary *Without Bullet* by Vakhtang Komakhidze, director of the *Reportiori* studio, which was banned by the central Georgian TV stations, caused great public interest.

The newspaper maintains close relations with local nongovernmental organizations and uses the information which it receives from them on violations of human rights, corruption and abuse of power in its work. In addition, the paper lets these organizations publish their articles. As representatives of nongovernmental organizations say, not a single hindrance has been created in the process of publishing those articles. Besides information exchange, nongovernmental organizations help the paper by providing legal consulting, which is very important in the paper's relations with the authorities.

1.2.4 Influence of *Gazeti Batumelebi's* activities on the development of the local media sector

The paper's influence on the development of the local media sector first and foremost results from the fact that it in effect is the

first independent print media outlet in the region. *Gazeti Batumelebi's* presence in the mountainous districts implies not only distribution of the product there, but also reporting on the region's problems. They even keep correspondents there for this purpose. In the past, to draw attention to local problems, local representatives of the central media had to be invited because the media which were owned or controlled by the authorities of the autonomous republic did not report on problems such as corruption, violation of social right, and indifference of the authorities. But now the local independent regional newspaper *Gazeti Batumelebi* has become a more accessible tribune. Another reason why the expansion of the paper's presence throughout the region is important is that readers in Ajaria's mountainous districts will receive balanced and quality media products about the developments in the region's centre and other districts. This will contribute to the development of socio-political activity and participation at the local level.

Gazeti Batumelebi's resources, which were developed with help from donor organizations, now help develop the local media sector. Journalists who were trained or retrained at the aforementioned *Free Journalists House*, which exists under the paper's auspices, will contribute to the development of other Batumi newspapers and the local electronic media.

It also has to be said that at the very first stage of launching the project, young journalists who were involved in it started to produce reports for the *25 Arkhi* TV company.

In the assessment of respondents who participated in focus group discussions, one of the manifestations of *Gazeti Batumelebi's* influence is that rival periodicals are trying to win public trust and, taking into account public demand, are changing their editorial policy. Gradually, the same issues emerge in their products that appear in *Gazeti Batumelebi*, their tendentiousness is diminishing, while balanced journalism is gaining an upper hand.

2. IMERETI

2.1 The State of the free media and their role in the region's public life

2.1.1 Media development overview

The majority of the Imeretian regional media are concentrated in the region's administrative centre, the city of Kutaisi. Their share in the total number of the region's media organizations is large. They also surpass others in the level of development and independence. Several newspapers stand out from among the Kutaisi print media, which are published regularly, are recognizable, and have a strong audience base. Despite this, there are many acute problems, especially with journalistic professionalism and skills. These problems derive from the lack of specialization and the absence of delimitation of the areas of work. The same journalist writes on many different issues, sometimes without even remote familiarity with the issue at hand. This, of course, has a negative effect on the quality of media products. All this does not apply to the *Akhali Gazeti* newspaper, to which the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* has provided assistance in professional development. More on this below.

Researchers were also interested in categorizing the media sources according to the criteria of neutrality of their position, impartiality, and balanced reporting. Representatives of the local NGO sector and readers who participated in focus group discussions held in Kutaisi in 2005 and 2006 named *Akhali Gazeti*, *Kutaisuri Versia*, and *PS* as papers meeting those criteria.

Impartiality in the regional media does not necessarily imply the existence of a common vision in the media products, and the notion itself might even be relative because different issues might be discussed from different positions. This argument is further strengthened by the fact that the difference of positions is based not only on journalistic interpretation of the developments, but also on the views of those NGOs which are close partners of the newspapers and which are viewed by the local public as conduits of some

political group's interests. This attitude influences the media, and the papers sometimes act as media for broadcasting the political views of some individual group.

Paradoxical though this may be, balanced reporting in the media has lately been hindered by the public interest that arose as a result of the authorities' anti-corruption policy. The public has developed the desire to see the facts of detention of people accused of corruption. The authorities too often invited the media to attend these types of arrests to demonstrate the effectiveness of their activities. Some representatives of the local media reported on the developments from the strongly pro-government positions, whereas others, on the contrary, opposed them without even trying to remain neutral (*Akbali Gazeti* and *PS* were named as exceptions in this respect). Because of lack of professionalism or for the purpose of drawing attention to a scandal, journalists present some situations as more tense than they really are. In such cases, the media provided biased coverage of developments and supplied "shows" of sorts to the public.

These problems can be averted if the local media and NGOs work together on legal issues. The local branch of the *Georgian Young Lawyers' Association* cooperated with the media to raise legal awareness of journalists. Areas of cooperation were determined on the basis of consultations with the journalists themselves. The association conducted monthly seminars and training courses for journalists on legal issues. Initially it was proposed to train one journalist from each media organization, but the effect achieved fell short of what was expected. Among the reasons for this was the local media's failure to keep professionals on their staff. The effect of cooperation is also reduced by frequent adoption of new laws or amendments to the existing laws by Parliament. This is why it is difficult to pass on these changes quickly to the media.

Public trusts the regional papers more than it does the electronic media. Of the latter, the *Dzveli Kalaki* radio is an exception. Among the factors that determine the greater trust in and recognizability of the newspapers is how consistent they are in the long term in reporting on the same issues. If some economic interests of the medium itself are sensed behind the paper's campaigns, this has a negative effect on public attitudes toward the medium.

The papers are doing their best to cover and report on all the pressing issues of the region's life. They are a reliable and stable source of information on the region's problems for the central media. In addition to the central media, they closely cooperate with NGOs which operate at the national, regional, and city levels. This enables the regional papers to raise their potential and at the same time get a good understanding of the pressing issues. For example, the Kutaisi branch of the *Georgian Young Lawyers' Association* regularly records citizens' written and phone-in complaints, categorizes them, and informs the papers about pressing problems. Media sources receive the same type of assistance from the Ombudsman Office's representative in Kutaisi.

2.1.2 Channels of informing the public

Research has demonstrated that the priority channels of receiving reliable information and news are:

1. The *Akhali Gazeti* newspaper
2. The *Dzveli Kalaki* radio
3. The *PS* newspaper
4. The *Kutaisuri Versia* newspaper
5. The *Rioni* TV company
6. The *Kalakis Radio*
7. The *Reziune* newspaper

Together with the local media sources, media outlets with nationwide coverage are also identified as information sources. Of these, greater preference is given to the electronic media:

1. The *Imedi* TV company
2. The *Rustavi-2* TV company
3. *Radio Liberty*
4. The *Imedi* radio
5. The *Georgian Public Broadcaster*

The following Georgian central print media were named:

1. The *Kviris Palitra* newspaper;
2. The *24 Saati* newspaper;
3. The *Georgian Times* newspaper;
4. The *Asaval-Dasavali* newspaper;

5. The *Alia* newspaper;
6. The *Rezonansi* newspaper.

The local public prefers the electronic media for their greater availability and faster news delivery. They trust the central media more than the local ones. From among the local electronic media, the *Dzveli Kalaki* radio is in greater demand. Its information is deemed more reliable, and its factual content is also better liked.

As for the print media, the public finds newspapers from Tbilisi more attractive than the local ones because it is interested in the developments which are under way in the country, and the analysis of the Georgian authorities' domestic and foreign policy. Besides, the papers published in Tbilisi are seen as more diversified. The audience reads the local papers mostly to familiarize itself with the work of the city and regional administration and receive the information on the processes which are under way in the local government. The readership is particularly interested in information from the corridors about different officials who are known to the public, including their economic interests and connections. Readers with greater civic awareness are interested how the current political and economic process in the country influenced their city and region, how reforms are unfolding, how protected human rights are, and what the crime situation in the city is.

In the local readers' opinion, the independent media are better positioned to cover these issues and supply better information. This is why they enjoy greater trust than the local administration's newspaper. The size of the independent newspaper's audience is directly proportional to the professional level of the journalists who work for the media organization. *Akhali Gazeti*, *PS*, and *Kutaisuri Versia* are the leaders in quality and respectively, professionalism. The papers are trying to develop their journalistic resource, work with the local NGO sector and international organizations. They are struggling to keep their staff because staff defection rate is high. They are trying to make up for it by attracting young beginner journalists. In readers' opinion, staff changes usually promptly affect the quality of articles, but they also note that editorial offices manage to quickly redress the situation by efficiently developing new staffers. Subscription and distribution networks which were created over the last five

years help the local papers achieve this. A substantial part of the circulation is sold in the retail network, which attests to public demand for media products.

The tone and working style of the print media was markedly aggressive a few years ago. At present, as journalists become more professional, their position when reporting on issues is more balanced, and the positions of the interested sides are presented, not replaced by the journalist's own interpretation of events. Unfortunately, this cannot be said about all the newspapers. Some papers' articles are instance of unbalanced criticism or, on the contrary, a eulogy. One of the respondents said:

“In my opinion, boundless criticism against some individuals stems from the editor's personal interests. The paper's journalists and editor cannot go beyond their personal interests, which, in my opinion, results from their closeness to some political forces.”

There are issues which are not covered by all media sources (for example, the local television avoids reporting violations of human rights) or are reviewed with different quality of analysis in different newspapers. The public appraises the professional level of journalists who work on a particular issue and chooses the media source which looks more reliable in terms of professionalism. The work of the paper's editorial office is judged by how the paper reports on the violations of human rights, police work, crime situation, religious minorities and so forth. Research shows that readers place greater trust in *Akhali Gazeti*.

The papers' attitude toward religion-related issues merits attention. They avoid reporting on confessional confrontations. *Akhali Gazeti* discussed the dissension between the Catholic and Orthodox communities several times. Articles on Orthodoxy seldom appear in the independent media, the *PS* newspaper being the only exception with the Orthodox rubric “Questions to Shepherd”. Articles of religious nature are particularly frequent in the local authorities' periodical.

The low level of journalistic education results not only in poor-quality articles, but also in the failure to report on some issues altogether. Assistance in development of journalistic skills implied teaching knowledge whose absence makes journalistic investigations,

monitoring of the elections and local administration's activities, and coverage of the human rights situation impossible. Accordingly, readers give a positive assessment to journalists' work in these areas, but there are others, such as, for example, the economy, which the local media either avoid or cover poorly. Respondents named *Akhali Gazeti* as an exception in this respect, whose journalists attended training in reporting on economic issues under the partnership project with the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*.

2.1.3 Free media and public expectations

It is the public's interest that the local media provide coverage of local problems in the following areas:

- The local authorities' activities
- The economic situation in the region
- Social issues and the progress of government programmes in this sector
- Social problems and crime among youth
- The human rights situation in the region and the protection of human rights in penitentiary facilities
- The environmental situation and diseases that are associated with it
- The city's cultural life

Readers judge the local media's work on the aforementioned issues by the quality of information analysis and interpretation. One of the participants in the focus group discussion in Kutaisi in 2006 said:

“Reporting in the media should be impartial, but each newspaper should cover the developments in its own way. Of course, this does not mean that they should write as they please and invent a whole story just to sell the newspaper. For example, the [...] newspaper's writing is biased and scandalous; there were layoffs at the Mayor's Office, and the paper reported on this very tententiously.”

In addition to balanced coverage, readers demand accuracy of the information as well. Even the papers which are in demand often make factual mistakes, for example, there are mistakes in names and place names, dates, factual data, and so forth.

It is important for the readers to know that there is no businessman or financial group behind the particular newspaper. In their opinion, no matter how impartial the text might seem, it will be immediately obvious that the paper will serve its sponsors' interests and implement the editorial policy which is desirable for them.

Respondents made no critical remarks about the papers' editorial policy. They like it when the management of some newspapers, for example, *Akhali Gazeti*, focuses on professional development of the journalistic staff. This indicates that the paper's editorial office takes responsibility. The readers' trust in the periodical increases accordingly.

Participants in the focus group discussions in Kutaisi in 2005-2006 discussed in which areas the papers should intensify their work and highlighted the following issues as recommendations:

- It would be good if the papers founded readers' clubs. They would both be able to popularize their products through these clubs and introduce a mechanism of feedback with the public, which would help them with further growth and development;
- Regular meetings with readers might become one of the feedback mechanisms; this would bring the newspaper's efforts in line with public expectations and demands;
- Feedback can be established by the method which has already been proven by *Akhali Gazeti*, the telephone hotline. In the readers' opinion, other papers should adopt this method;
- The papers should put forth more efforts to advertise their products; it would be good if readers could hear the information on highlights of the next issue in advance on the radio. It would also be good if the best articles of the month were published in a separate booklet;
- Adding entertainment pages would be desirable to ensure diversity of topics covered by newspapers;
- Journalists should demonstrate more consistency when reporting on issues, especially in investigative articles, and should try to report on the development of a fact they have already reported on;
- Higher periodicity would be desirable for readers, so that analysis follows up soon and coincides with the developments;

- The local public is also interested in the city's and region's cultural life; this is why local artists, writers and performers, especially beginners, should be popularized and given the opportunity to express themselves, and cultural events which are of interest for youth should be covered.

2.1.4 Media and the authorities

Today the local media have constructive relations with the local authorities. However, even before 2005 there were periods when relations between the regional administration and a number of media organizations, for example, the *PS* newspaper and *Dzveli Kalaki* radio, were quite strained. The reason was that government officials demonstrated retaliatory reaction to the media's scathing criticism in their address. For example, they would refuse to make comments or give interviews and sometimes delayed supplying public information to journalists. In these situations, representatives of the NGO sector helped media organizations by launching information campaigns to put pressure on the authorities and, besides, provided consultations to media organizations on different procedural issues, for example, on how to maintain relations with different agencies of the local authorities or what obligations the latter had under the law with regard to the issuance of public information.

Over the last few years, the media have been providing a broad coverage of the personnel changes in the government. The media differ in their coverage of frequent changes in the local authorities. Some newspapers are excessively critical of these changes, others provide more impartial and balanced coverage. The Kutaisi media assume a uniformly critical position on a number of issues, such as the functioning of the judiciary and police. When reporting on issues like restoration and development of the urban infrastructure, social programmes and public health, journalists' position is sometimes constructive and balanced, sometimes moderately critical, but sometimes it can become downright radical.

2.2 The *Akhali Gazeti* newspaper

2.2.1 International donor organizations' assistance and *Akhali Gazeti's* organizational development

In 2004, *Akhali Gazeti* joined the *Regional Media Development and Public Accountability* project, under which the paper received regular financial, technical and expert support from the project's leading organization, the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*. In 2004-2006, a series of training courses were conducted for the purpose of the paper's development, whose objectives included:

- Structural development of the organization and introduction of modern management standards;
- Introduction of the marketing policy, which would give the paper sufficient expertise in this field to improve the organization's economic sustainability by attracting advertisers after the end of the project;
- Refinement of editorial policy by introducing modern standards of journalism and consistently adhering to ethical norms;
- Development of the journalists' professional level and skills, diversification of their areas of expertise and improvement of the quality of the paper's content.

Accordingly, the managerial and editorial functions were divided at the paper's editorial office, a separate marketing position was created, journalists were grouped according to the areas of specialization. This improved the paper's layout dramatically: rubrics were divided into permanent and traditional, the pages appeared on education, healthcare, military, and so forth. The paper itself was divided into information and analytical parts. The information section is for its part divided into several parts, with one of the pages dedicated to the information received from other regional papers which are partners in the project. Next page features the week's main topic, followed by political, legal, economic, health, education, and military pages. In addition, each issue features reports in photographs on a pressing issue. Since 2005, the paper produces reports in photographs on developments in other towns of the region.

At the beginning of the project, one of the main goals of the paper was to achieve diversity of topics covered. Although the paper did report on different topics, it was difficult to arrange materials according to the topic from one issue to the next. The same journalist found it difficult to consistently write about the same topic over a long period. Producing a good interview was also difficult. Thanks to the training courses conducted in 2005, and with help of the editor of the *24 Saati* newspaper – a partner in the project – these difficulties were overcome. At present, the paper does not have the problem of lack of professional journalists any more.

There are certain signs of progress in the paper's editorial policy as well. So many quality analytical materials accumulated at *Akbali Gazeti's* editorial office that it became necessary to either increase the paper's page count or further narrow down the journalists' areas of specialization to avoid the threat of monotony. The editorial office resolved the problem by intensifying their work on preparation of reports from districts. This resulted in diversification of the areas of work of the journalists on the one hand and in expansion of the area of operation and, accordingly, entry to the potential sales markets on the other. *Akbali Gazeti* drew attention to itself outside Kutaisi too. However, the problem of selling the paper in other towns of the region still exists due to the economic situation there.

Partnership with the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* gave the paper the opportunity to establish relations with other international organizations. The paper's journalists were informed by the partner about the training courses and seminars that were conducted by those organizations and participated in them. Its journalists' professional development creates some problems for the paper of keeping their staff. The growing professional level of journalists makes them competitive at both local and Tbilisi job market. At present, the paper's revenues and participation in the projects by the NGO sector enables the editorial office to create mechanisms of financial remuneration and offering of incentives to the journalists. Journalists themselves noted that although the financial aspect of their job is important, the opportunity to realize one's creative potential is even more important, and *Akbali Gazeti* creates a good environment for them to accomplish this. The paper is trying to attract young jour-

nalists who are doing training on the job in *Akhali Gazeti* and create a reserve of sorts both for the paper itself and for other local media organizations. The paper employs the following mechanism of attracting and stimulating beginner journalists: a contest is announced for the local university's journalism students; the authors of the best articles that were submitted during the contest not only get involved in the paper's work but also get one-year scholarship from *Akhali Gazeti*.

From 2005, the paper became more active in the field of investigative journalism. The public and the local authorities started to react to articles on the energy sector, social and healthcare problems, trafficking in humans, and violations of human rights from the very outset. The authorities initially had a negative and aggressive reaction to the paper, but then this attitude changed. At present, the authorities are trying to resolve problematic issues not to give the media the reason for criticism. The paper wrote about violations that were exposed in the energy sector, and the authorities reacted. One of the participants in a focus group discussion in 2006 noted about that incident:

“Two criminal cases were initiated after *Akhali Gazeti's* articles on the installation of residential electricity metres against the companies which illegally collected money from the residents. The director of the Georgian United Electricity Distribution Company and the then coordinator of the installation of electricity metres were summoned by the Financial Police for interrogation.”

It is noteworthy that the paper's articles produce this reaction not only in the region's administrative centre. The articles on the local administration of Terjola district also caused a stir. The district administration did a hard job to uproot the violations which the paper had exposed.

The main objective of the paper's management is getting as close as possible to meeting public demands. For this purpose, the paper is studying its readers' interests by holding focus group discussions and plans its work according to the issues that are raised. A successful example of meeting the readers' interests and demands was the hotline, when readers phoned the editorial office and left messages describing their problems and posing questions (especially about the energy sector). The paper's journalists carried out an in-

vestigation using the information collected from the readers or took interviews using the readers' questions. This made it possible to quickly collect information on the pressing issues of society on the one hand and ensure communication between the authorities and the public on the other.

As a result of this, public interest and trust in *Akbali Gazeti* increased, as did the number of buyers and subscribers and accordingly, the circulation. If in 2004, when the project was launched, *Akbali Gazeti's* circulation was 700, in 2005 it reached 1,000, and in 2006 – 1,800. The paper's page count also increased, which raised its price too: in the retail network, it costs 50 tetri.

Akbali Gazeti started to seek advertisers proactively. During the period of cooperation with the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, two positions of advertising agents were created. They are in charge of finding commercial and social advertising and working on paid-for ads. They attended special training courses for this purpose. The number of commercial ads not only from Kutaisi, but also from economic entities based in other towns of the region in *Akbali Gazeti* has increased. Accordingly, revenues from advertising have also grown. But these revenues still cannot fully support the paper; revenues from paid-for ads (congratulations, obituaries) are greater.

Functions in the paper's management team are distributed the following way: the chief editor, editor, manager, two advertising agents. The chief editor supervises both journalistic staff and the work of the management team; the editor is responsible for the paper's content; and the manager supervises the advertising department and has the responsibility of finding subscribers and creating the distribution network.

The rest of the newspaper staff are mostly journalists. There are 20 journalists in *Akbali Gazeti*. Some of them work in different districts of the region (Tsqaltubo, Khoni, Vani, Samtredia, Zestaponi, Terjola, Sachkhere). The paper has a designer/system administrator, who underwent training in these areas with assistance from the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*.

In the form of technical assistance, *Akbali Gazeti* received from the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* two computers, a diesel generator, a still camera and a dictation machine. This assistance has increased the paper's technological potential.

2.2.2 *Akhali Gazeti's* editorial policy and public demand

Under the project, the paper made creating its public image and carving out its niche its priority goals. The editorial office is trying to avoid mistakes in choosing its target social groups. As mentioned above, the paper resorts to methods of sociological studies too for this purpose. In addition, *Akhali Gazeti's* chief editor analyzes the readers' feedback on a monthly basis and also verifies whether the issues that were identified in opinion polls correspond with the issues that paper reports on. All this helps the paper create products which meet its audience's requirements. Control of the quality of materials published by the newspaper is also important (whether reports are balanced, norms of journalistic ethics are protected, analysis and arguments are strong), which is done under joint supervision of the editor and chief editor. If the quality of the layout does not fit into editorial policy standards, the article may not get published and may be sent back to the author for amendment.

This approach has an effect on the paper's quality and is given an unambiguously positive assessment by the audience:

"I read *Akhali Gazeti*, like their analytical materials. They are good. There is no sign of tendentiousness there... *Akhali Gazeti* supplies wealth of information, on the economy, business, politics, as well as developments in Tbilisi... *Akhali Gazeti* produced a new rubric on family-run businesses, it is possible to get consulting on this too. It is oriented toward specific target groups, and they get new proposals too."

The new rubric on small and medium businesses has both reports on the situation in this sector in general and consultations by experts. The paper often contacts banks and with their support supplies information to businessmen on procedures of transacting with banks and getting loans. The paper has close cooperation with appropriate government agencies too, which supply information to the reader via the newspaper on the legal framework for starting a business or on rules of interacting with the state for already existing businesses. Readers receive information and consulting on this subject not only from the paper's pages; they can

also phone the editorial office and ask an expert in these matters for advice directly.

Not only the variety of information in the paper, but its technological level are also acceptable for readers:

“Among the advantages of *Akbali Gazeti* is that both visually and quality-wise it is better made than other papers. In addition, they write about the problems of other districts of the region.”

Respondents who participated in the research noted that the variety of information in *Akbali Gazeti* fully meets their requirements. They especially like the efforts of the paper’s editorial office to always introduce something new instead of being satisfied with what they have achieved. The new rubric, report in photographs, is one of these welcome novelties.

2.2.3 *Akbali Gazeti’s* role in the region’s public life

At the stage of involvement in the *Regional Media Development and Public Accountability* project, *Akbali Gazeti* already had potential to influence the socio-political processes under way in the region. Contacts under that project with the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* and other regional and central newspapers and experts significantly raised the paper’s potential. As a result of the improvement of editorial and journalistic work under the project, close cooperation with the local authorities and NGO sector, and the development of a distribution network, *Akbali Gazeti’s* role as a mediator has increased. Of NGOs, local branches of *Georgian Young Lawyer’s Association* and *Liberty Institute* cooperated with the paper. Participation of *Akbali Gazeti* in the projects and events that were implemented in cooperation with them is not limited to reporting on the activities of the NGO sector. It plays the role of a key component in the process of conducting civic campaigns. Often the paper itself is an initiator of these types of activities. As a result, when violations of human rights (often these are violations of rights of religious confessions and inmates of penitentiary facilities), abuse of authority by local officials, graft, or indifference of some department of the local authority take place, *Akbali Gazeti* launches both awareness and active civic campaigns.

This enables it to establish communication between the public at large and the NGO sector on the one hand and to create an effective mechanism influencing and exerting pressure on the regional administration on the other.

2.2.4 *Akbali Gazeti's* influence on the local media sector

The level of media development in the Imereti region is higher compared to other regions. It is difficult to ascertain what influence one particular media organization can have on the development of the media sector in general. Competition between the leading regional newspapers is stiff, and this is an incentive to develop in its own right for the local media organizations. In this context, growth and progress of one particular newspaper is already a challenge for the rest.

Partnership with the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* helped *Akbali Gazeti* to improve its structure and functions in different ways:

- The paper's management structure was improved;
- Clear-cut priority objectives of the editorial policy were formulated;
- The paper's social niche and audience were determined;
- The paper's technological base was improved to ensure high quality and attractiveness of the paper;
- Professional development of journalists resulted in the variety of covered issues and balanced reporting;
- The paper's financial situation was consolidated as a result of growing sales and increased revenues from advertising.

The paper's success did not go unnoticed. Studies conducted in 2006 in Kutaisi to study the readership's attitude toward the print media show that the same changes in the discourse and style of supplying information were noticeable in other leading newspapers in the city as *Akbali Gazeti* was undergoing a year before. Moreover, interviews with representatives of local NGOs showed that sharing the colleagues' successful experience was important for the managers of those newspapers.

Yet another aspect of *Akbali Gazeti's* work, which influences the development of the regional media, is that under the *Regional*

Media Development and Public Accountability project, the paper succeeded in expanding its distribution network to incorporate the majority of districts in Imereti. As a result, the area of public debates around the paper has become larger, and the paper has become capable of supplying information to the entire region. Going to the regional level and reporting in the regional context is broadening the readership's civic awareness and stimulates its civic activity. Creation by *Akbali Gazeti* of a comprehensive circle of information flow in and outside the administrative centre of Imereti facilitates formulating the fundamentals of the region's common socio-political programme.

3. KAKHETI

3.1. The state of the free media and their role in the region's public life

3.1.1 Media development overview

The regional media in Kakheti are different from those in other regions in terms of their development. The town of Gurjaani is particularly conspicuous for the number and stability of independent print media sources. Several independent newspapers are published here regularly and enjoy high levels of recognizability among the local public. One of these is the *Spektri* newspaper, which was selected for partnership under the *Regional Media Development and Public Accountability* project by the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*.

In local experts' assessments, the regional media are very active and play an important socio-political function. The media sector is quite diverse, and the competition among the media sources is rather stiff. They are trying to project a special image of themselves according to specific requirements and tastes of different audiences. It can be said that all the newspapers that are published in Gurjaani have managed to firmly establish themselves in their social niches. They have their respective focus areas and styles and, despite their number, are not similar to one another. Precisely this accounts for the demand for their products by different social groups. They not only actively report on current developments, but also organize many important meetings both in Gurjaani district and the Kakheti region. Thus, it can be said that they are actively involved in local social and political processes. The media's social activities largely stem from their close ties with the local nongovernmental sector, and coalition relations with the latter help the media not only to effectively pursue their professional activities, but also to establish relations with the authorities and political groups. Cooperation with the nongovernmental sector facilitates the creation of media coalitions in the region. Nongovernmental organizations conduct regional information campaigns on certain issues. As a result of joint efforts of media

sources from different districts of Kakheti and their work in the same direction, exchange of information and experience become more intense and, most importantly, a permanently functioning and stable communication network is taking shape. The network of media organizations working for the common purpose incorporates not only print, but also electronic media. The functioning of these types of networks is important not only for media development, but also for stimulation of political life of local society in general. The primary goal of these networks is establishing regular communication not only between the regional authorities and the public, but also between the public and political groups. Accordingly, using the media to achieve this objective facilitates the establishment of permanent communication channels between the media and the local authorities, as well as between local political groups and people's representatives who were elected to the national legislative body. The existence of these networks and participation of the media in them is one of the important prerequisites for the development of media sources and for the media to carry out its mission.

With their level of development and experience, the newspapers that are published in Gurjaani are playing an important role in these networks. In general, the grave situation with the print media development in the region increases their importance, so their cooperation with regional nongovernmental and political organizations is a priority. Donor organizations' assistance in professional growth and development has put Gurjaani newspapers in much more favourable conditions.

Among the media sources currently operating in Gurjaani, three newspapers particularly stand out. *Kakbetis Khma* was founded in 2002 and is the first independent newspaper which greatly contributed to the further development of the media. Numerous other newspapers were founded in Gurjaani after that, but the majority of them proved to be short-lived and closed as soon as donor assistance ended. But *Kakbetis Khma* won trust of both international donor organizations and local readers and managed to firmly take its place in the local media sector. Its editorial policy requires adherence to the principles of journalistic ethics; this too is a reason for

the public's positive attitude toward the paper. Balanced reporting and journalistic impartiality are in general problematic areas in the regional media, and complaints in this regard are voiced against *Kakhetis Khma* too.

The *Spektri* newspaper, which was founded in 2003, won the local public's trust, and its reporting style made it an attractive partner for both local and nationwide organizations. Participation in the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting's* coalition project also helped it establish working contacts. The paper's editorial office is trying to observe the norms of journalistic ethics and play the role of an impartial mediator. Partnership with international organizations greatly helped the evolution of this policy of the paper. From the day of founding, the paper's reporting has been increasingly balanced, and the qualification and professional level of its journalists has been rising. It can be said that both papers, *Spektri* and *Kakhetis Khma*, cater to the interests of the same audience. Accordingly, in the conditions of equal capabilities and resources, they compete with each other for the audience. And this in itself is a positive incentive for further development of these organizations.

The *Imedi* newspaper, which is also published in Gurjaani, occupies a different niche from the aforementioned newspapers and is oriented more toward reporting on scandalous issues. Understandably, it is not short of the local authorities' and political or business groups' attention because of this. The paper's tone is radical, its policy is not very balanced, but its thematic diversity attracts the nongovernmental sector and other representatives of the media, and at the same time it addresses certain areas of public interest. The paper is well-established, and its recognizability is high.

The *Gurjaani* newspaper is published in Gurjaani, which, despite its independent legal status, is seen by the public as the local administration's periodical. However, this image does not prevent the paper's chief editor and journalists from criticizing different aspects of the local authorities' activities from time to time or from cooperating with the NGO sector. The paper's audience is mostly the staff of the local administration, so both circulation and periodicity are limited, which for its part limits its ability to reach the general public.

In Gurjaani, and in the region in general, competition forces the papers to focus on their development and to widen the variety of their products and make them more attractive to the public. Their motivation to secure support of international and donor organizations is also high. Naturally, this type of support is very important for the development of the media sector in the region.

3.1.2 Channels of informing the public

Research has demonstrated that the priority channels of receiving reliable information and news are:

1. The *Spektri* newspaper
2. The *Imedi* newspaper
3. The *Kakhetis Khma* newspaper
4. The *Gurjaani* TV company

Together with the local media sources, the media sources with nationwide coverage are also identified as information sources. Interviewed local residents gave preference to the electronic media rather than the print media (*Imedi* TV company, *Imedi* radio, *Rustavi-2* TV company, *Mtsvane Talgha* radio, *Radio Liberty*, *Fortuna* radio). Newspapers and magazines published in Tbilisi (the *Kviris Palitra*, *Asaval-Dasavali*, *The Georgian Times*, *Akhali Versia*, *24 Saati*, *Alia*, *Rezonansi* newspapers) are read for awareness of the developments in the country, but there is little trust in information on Kakheti that is published in these. The level of trust in the papers that are published in Gurjaani is high, but the public attitude toward different periodicals varies according to different types of interest and requirements. One category of readers read *Kakhetis Khma* because it covers not only regional, but also national news and developments. Those who are interested in scandals and sensations read *Imedi*. Quite a substantial part of the public read the *Spektri* newspaper because they deem its policy more balanced. The *Progresi* newspaper also had a clearly defined audience, but the paper has failed to keep maintain periodicity due to financial problems; and the readership, of course, prefers to buy periodicals which supply information regularly.

The highly competitive environment forces the papers to develop their distinguishing features without losing touch with the

realities. It is not advantageous for them to distort the facts to keep and attract their readership. When writing on the same issue, journalists state the facts in the same way, but they are trying to present the subject from different points of view and with their interpretation when they analyze it. However, this cannot be said about all the periodicals, as some completely go beyond these limits yet still cannot complain about the lack of readers.

Researchers took interest in how broad the segment of the population which reads newspapers is. It turned out to be the case that in Kakheti, newspaper readers are predominantly those who are interested in politics. Accordingly, this segment comprises politically aware civil servants and representatives of the middle class who work at educational institutions. Representatives of nongovernmental organizations, who are also highly interested in politics, constitute a small segment of readers. The rural population shows almost no interest in the print media. Newspapers in the villages are distributed among the same civil servants and school teachers. It follows that the distribution of the print media is mostly limited to the region's administrative centres.

The newspaper's image affects the distribution of the audience. The newspaper's design and title also promote its recognizability. One respondent (participant in the focus group discussion in 2005) noted on these differences:

“*Kakhetis Khma* is very popular, and its title helps this too; *Spektri* may publish a better article, it may be more interesting, but the uninformed buyer will still ask for *Kakhetis Khma* at a kiosk because its title suggests that the paper is published in Kakheti. Many people might not even realize that *Spektri* is a Kakhetian regional newspaper, not a central one.”

In 2006, when discussing the papers' recognizability and strengths according to the same parameters, participants in the focus group discussion noted *Spektri's* progress. One of the participants noted:

“I have great respect for *Spektri* and read it, it publishes very solid and competent articles... Its design has changed, it looks better, catches one's eye...”

3.1.3 Free media and public expectations

Public interest in the work of the local media, given the social and economic peculiarity of the Kakheti region, is focused on the following issues:

- Functioning of the regional administration and district-level bodies and the problem of corruption;
- Relations between the local authorities and independent economic entities;
- Monitoring and assessment of the programmes aimed at development of the region's agrarian sector, and particularly viticulture;
- Social problems and domestic crime, work of the law enforcement bodies, monitoring of human rights violations;
- Social problems and reporting on measures designed to tackle them;
- Focusing on youth problems;
- Reporting on the region's cultural life.

The newspapers published in Gurjaani are trying to follow these guidelines and monitor the level of public interest generated by publishing an article on a given issue, and if the article is about the authorities or their actions, then the reaction as well. Of course, it is hard to calculate how promptly the problem that was raised in the article will be resolved, but if it causes sufficient amount of stir among the public, the authorities become active and attempt to resolve the problematic issue. There is no problem at the district or regional level which journalists would be unwilling to report on, but saying that all the problems that were raised in the paper get resolved would be an exaggeration.

The local readership's attitudes toward the information and analysis in the newspaper are not uniform. There is no clear-cut demand for balanced information and impartial analysis. Respondents who participated in focus group discussions in both 2005 and 2006 did not have the same position. Opinions split dramatically. If some respondents spoke in support of balanced and fair articles, for others the articles' scandalous and often insulting tone was completely acceptable. One of the respondents said that this approach is "perceived as accusatory, not insulting." And another

respondent, who deemed balanced nature of the information and analysis a higher priority, said:

“If I may say so, some people express their critical opinions in a polite way, whereas in other newspapers this is done recklessly, in a way that is far from polite... Often insulting words are addressed to some officials, and I, as a citizen, do not like this.”

This variety of demands and attitudes toward the information and analysis in the newspapers among the newspapers’ readership results in diversity of the Gurjaani press.

A study that was conducted in Telavi gave us an interesting picture regarding this issue. There, the readership’s negative attitude toward unverified, scandalous, and biased information was clearly demonstrated. Local respondents said that it would be desirable to raise the journalists’ professional level, refine their writing culture, and make the editorial policy incorporate the norms of journalistic ethics.

The Kakhetian readership appraise the quality of the papers’ product by comparing it with the quality of the papers published in Tbilisi. This mainly pertains to the technical aspects of media products. Participants in focus group discussions highlighted the following aspects which, in their opinion, need to be changed:

- Journalistic language and style;
- Print quality, typos, computer graphics and design;
- Expensive retail price of the newspaper; (not everyone can afford an issue of a local newspaper; they can buy an issue of a central newspaper for the same price.)
- The local media are poorly advertised, not everyone in the remote areas of Gurjaani district knows even about the existence of the papers that are published here;
- Information published by the paper has to be verified. Sources must be cited.

As for the factual side of the newspapers, readers want even more coverage of the local developments in the local papers and less coverage of the developments in the capital city. One of the participants in the focus group discussion said:

“You often read in the newspaper what some pop singer said or did in Tbilisi. But we can read this in *Kviris Palitra* or *Sarke*

too. Here (in Gurjaani) we have an excellent troupe, which is often invited both to Tbilisi and abroad, why do they not write about it?”

For the paper to be more interesting for readers, in their opinion, there is a need:

- For the newspapers to strive to cover not only criminal cases and violations of the norms of public morality, but also the opposite cases;
- For the papers to be more active in shaping civic culture, to print more materials in support of civic education;
- For the local media to pay more attention to youth problems and perform some educational functions as well by publishing more educational and popular science materials.

3.1.4 Media and the authorities

Relations between the media sources in Gurjaani and the local authorities are mainly of a cooperative nature. Against the backdrop of cooperation with the NGO sector, analytical newspaper articles on the authorities' work usually produce a positive reaction and the media have the possibility to follow the process of resolving the reported problem too. Despite this, relations between some media sources and the local authorities are still strained and both sides tend to go beyond the limits of ethics and legality. These newspapers often accuse local officials of illegal actions or abuse of power on the basis of unverified information, for which the accused call the editorial office to account. This type of settling of accounts often gets personal instead of getting resolved as prescribed by the law.

The authorities have been demonstrating greater openness to the media of late and have invited representatives of all the media sources to the events they organize. The local administration realizes perfectly well that the media can play a great role in planning and establishing public relations. This is why they need media coverage of all the steps they take, especially if these steps prove to be successful. The authorities have made communications with the media their priority; this manifests itself in the fact that now

professional journalists head the local administrations' departments for relations with the media and the public, which have made these departments noticeably more efficient. Local journalists noted that compared to the past, receiving public information is now easier and that the aforementioned department of the local administration promptly and regularly supplies them with requested information. Staffers of the majority of the Gurjaani newspapers say that they can receive information from the local administration almost without problems and that there has not been a single instance in the last two years of them not receiving the requested information.

3.2 The *Spektri* newspaper

3.2.1 Assistance from international donor organizations and the newspaper's organizational development

In 2005-2006, *Spektri* experienced major development under the *Regional Media Development and Public Accountability* project in partnership with the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*. It joined the project in 2004, when the paper had only one year's organizational experience. With the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting's* help, the paper in three years' period:

- Improved its technical infrastructure;
- Received financial support, which enabled it to mobilize its own financial resources for different purposes;
- Received expert assistance on the paper's organizational development and structural improvement, and first and foremost, acquired better managerial skills and got acquainted with others' experience;
- Received expert support on marketing and acquired broader knowledge in the fields of attracting advertisers, advertising media products, planning, and organizing;
- Received expert support on professional development and broadening of journalists' experience, with special focus on how editorial policy should be formulated in compliance with the audience's demands and how quality control should be improved.

As a result of assistance in the aforementioned areas:

- The organization's technical potential of finding information efficiently and reacting to the important regional developments has risen;
- The newspaper's quality has improved through the betterment of the publishing technology (design, print quality, photographic material);
- The mobilization of financial resources enabled the paper's management to expand its distribution network (in different numbers, the paper is distributed in almost all districts of Kakheti region, part of the circulation is sold in Tbilisi as well);
- The paper's structure is outlined more clearly, managerial and editorial functions diverged. In the journalistic staff too workload has been redistributed. Every journalist covers issues that are specifically assigned to him/her, which results in regular coverage of the issues reported by the paper and their division into rubrics;
- Improvements in managerial and marketing skills influenced the paper's revenues too; search for advertisements is more active, but owing to the weak economy the volume of commercial advertising is low. This is why the paper is trying to attract social advertising and publish ads from Tbilisi too. It is doubtful, however, that revenues from this will exceed revenues from the sales;
- The journalists' better professional level and skills have had a positive effect on the paper's content; the paper made progress in analytical direction as well. In the opinion of participating respondents, *Spektri's* coverage and interpretation of developments presents different opinions and therefore is trustworthy.

Spektri's audience is mostly regional intelligentsia, civil servants and individuals who are interested in socio-political processes. This audience provides a sufficiently solid readership base to the paper's editorial policy of being an analytical periodical. That the editorial office does not resort to "yellow" topics leaves no room for expansion of the readership base.

The *24 Saati* newspaper, which is published in Tbilisi and was also involved in the *Regional Media Development and Public Accountability* project by the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, played a major role

in raising the professional level of the paper's staff and accordingly, the paper's quality. 24 Saati's editor regularly consulted *Spektri's* editorial office and journalists on improving both technical and factual aspects of the paper.

The *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* helped *Spektri* with the professional development of the staff. Thanks to its expert assistance, the number of published articles increased dramatically. Some 20 to 30 articles are written using reports from different districts for each issue. Which of these should be published is decided at the joint meeting of the editorial office and the journalistic staff. Articles for print are selected according to the criteria of how pressing the issue is and whether there is a great public interest in it at that time. Growth in the number of articles raised the issue of increasing the page count. If before joining the project the paper had 12 pages, now it has 16.

Spektri is distributed by two regional limited liability companies, *Elva* and *Iposervisi*, and one nationwide distribution agency, *Sakpres*. These agencies deliver the paper to the retail outlets in the Kakheti region, and delivering it to subscribers is also their responsibility. At present, *Spektri* has 700 subscribers, and the total circulation fluctuates between 1,500 and 2,000. (The editorial office determines the upper limit of the issue circulation by gauging public interest in the materials that are published in the issue.)

Technical assistance under the project has improved the paper's technological infrastructure. The *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* handed over two computers, a printer, a scanner, a digital still camera, and an electricity generator to the paper. Besides these, the paper's equipment includes two computers, a printer, and a still camera.

The number of the paper's staff is stable: in 2006, it had the same number of staffers as in 2004, eighteen: editor, manager, three technical support staff, bookkeeper, two journalists in Telavi, two in Dedoplistsqaro, two in Lagodekhi, one in Qvareli, one in Akhmeta, one each in Signaghi and Tsnori, and three in Gurjaani itself.

3.2.2. Public demand and *Spektri's* editorial policy

The paper's editorial policy ensures that all the articles that are published in the paper take into account to the fullest extent its

readers' expectations and demands. The day after an issue is published, the entire editorial staff gathers and plans what topics should go to print in the next issue according to their public significance and interest, and then the issues are distributed individually according to each journalist's sphere of competence. However, journalists are free to find material themselves and produce an article. This is more relevant for journalists working in other districts who have more information about the processes that are under way in their districts and can react to developments there much faster.

Whether or not the quality and content of the issue meets public demand is decided by the editorial office. If the editor makes some important changes to an article before the publication of an issue, she does this with author's agreement. If the text does not meet some requirements, the editor returns the text to the author with request to change it.

The paper categorically denounces scandalous articles and subjective journalistic interpretations of facts. The editorial office is trying to adhere to the norms of journalistic ethics. This approach is particularly frequently applied to the articles written in the area of investigative journalism. *Spektri's* journalists attended numerous training in that area during the period of cooperation with the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*. The outcome of combined efforts by the paper's editorial office, journalists, and donor organizations is growing public trust in *Spektri* in 2005-2006. Participants in the focus group discussion, which was held in 2005 in Gurjaani, noted that they trusted the *Spektri* newspaper, but not to a greater extent than other local newspapers, and that unverified information was still published in the newspaper, albeit rarely. At the meetings in 2006, readers of the local newspaper commented that now *Spektri* deserved more trust and approval. It was demonstrated that trust in the paper in a large part depended on the editors' and journalists' personal qualities. One of the respondents said:

“For me, *Spektri* is most acceptable because its journalists are not marred... We have no information that *Spektri* and its staff have blackmailed anyone. We have never found out that its editor or journalist went to some official and said that they had some compromising material about them and would not publish it if

they got paid, or that they would write well about the person in return for subscription.”

That balanced reporting and impartiality play a decisive role in winning trust for the newspaper was clearly stated by respondents in the 2005 and 2006 focus group discussions. When asked in what kinds of articles they felt greater balance than in other newspapers, some respondents said:

“Mainly crime issues and investigations, *Spektri* reports on these issues with less bias.”

Respondents also noted public importance of *Spektri*'s special topics:

“The paper has a medical and healthcare rubric... People are impoverished, and they get exact information on where they should go, whom they should see, and what they should do about a particular disease... Legal counselling which is provided to the public in the form of questions and answers is also important.”

Asked about the advantages of *Spektri* over other papers in Gurjaani, respondents mentioned the following:

- Greater freedom of views can be felt in reporting on problematic issues;
- Rubrics are more diversified;
- The paper is not a broadsheet format, but the information in it is mostly written by local journalists;
- The majority of articles is about the problems in the district and region, and the paper's pages are not “filled up with materials from the Internet”;
- There is a focus on the coverage of activities of the local bodies that implement state social programmes.

3.2.4. *Spektri*'s role in the region's public life

By reporting on Gurjaani district's and, in general, the Kakheti region's pressing problems, *Spektri* performs an important social and political function. On the one hand, it strengthens, together with other local independent newspapers, the ties between the local authorities and the public, and on the other hand, it urges the politi-

cally aware segment of the public to demonstrate greater civic activity. In this respect, *Spektri's* involvement in cooperation between the local media and the NGO sector is also important as it contributes to the development and broadening of civil discourse in the region.

The paper maintains close working ties with local NGOs and reports information it receives from them on violations of human rights, corruption, and abuse of power. In addition, *Spektri* gives these organizations newspaper space for their contributions. Respondents from NGOs noted that publishing something in *Spektri* has never been problematic.

The paper has never been indifferent when illegal methods of putting pressure on media sources or other social groups were used. Together with other media organizations, it participates in civic campaigns to put pressure on the authorities. *Spektri* itself has more than once organized these types of events.

The paper's participation in the *Regional Media Development and Public Accountability* project raises its potential of conducting powerful awareness campaigns to support and protect civic values and the principles of the rule-of-law state. The network of regional media organizations, which took shape in the process of participation in the project, makes it possible for the covered topics to cause greater repercussions. Through this network, the paper established regular contacts with international and Georgian organizations, which helped it take Gurjaani's and regional problems to a wider arena and find ways of resolving them.

3.2.5 Influence of *Spektri* on the development of the local media sector

Several competing newspapers of roughly equal potential and stability are published in the region. None of them individually is capable of exerting cardinal influence on the development of the media sector. This has to be taken into account when discussing *Spektri's* contribution to the development of the media sector.

In the process of partnership, the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* gave the paper a tremendous impetus for development. The

effect of three years of personnel development on *Spektri's* quality and analytical skills is obvious. Precisely thanks to this the paper has managed to occupy a stable social niche, deserve public trust, and influence the establishment and development of civic discourse. *Spektri's* success is an incentive for other print media to become more competitive. Focus group discussions revealed that, knowingly or otherwise, the content of some media organizations' products has also changed following *Spektri's* progress. In respondents' opinion, even the media, which used to attract their audience with scandalous reporting and radical opinions, are now trying to make their products more substantive.

Spektri's successful experience of cooperation with an international organization is an incentive for other media sources to seek contacts with international donor organizations to increase their resources and stability.

That the audience has acquired more discriminating tastes and changed its attitudes toward the information supplied by the papers can also be considered *Spektri's* partial or indirect influence on the development of the local media sector. The studies conducted in 2005 and 2006 clearly demonstrate the dynamics of changing public attitudes toward the quality of media products. According to previous studies, a large number of respondents gave preference to scandalous information and argued that this was a more effective way of drawing the authorities' attention to the pressing regional issues, whereas the latest study demonstrated that the same proportion of respondents changed their minds. In their opinion, if the paper is capable of in-depth analysis and presentation of its analysis to the public in a proper manner, local officials, as members of the same society, will realize and appreciate the problems that are raised, and in some cases, their reaction will be a positive one. When discussing public tastes and demands, it should probably also be taken into account that the change of the local authorities' style of government itself also had some positive effect on these.

4. SAMTSKHE-JAVAKHETI

4.1 The state of the free media and their role in the region's public life

4.1.1 Media development overview

The trend in the development of the independent media in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region has changed dramatically in recent years. In 2004-2005, seven regional newspapers were published periodically or with frequent delays between issues. (Some of these newspapers are no longer published, others exist only formally but do not function.) They either operated under the local administrations' auspices or were formally independent while in effect under the same local administrations' influence. Dependence of the formally independent media on the local authorities resulted from the financial and economic problems. To survive, the paper's editorial office was "forced" to ask the local authorities for assistance and accordingly, to take their interests into account. After the regional NGOs, *Javakheti Association for Media Development* (Akhalkalaki) and *Samtskhe-Javakheti Centre for Civil Initiative* (Akhaltsikhe), together with the Tbilisi office of the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, founded a new regional newspaper *Samkhetis Karibche* in 2004, the independent print media acquired new development opportunities in a new environment. Regular financial and technical assistance turned the paper into the only regional periodical and created a much more solid economic basis for it compared to other newspapers, which put it out of competitors' reach.

Newspapers in Samtskhe-Javakheti used to be published on a monthly basis, and some media organizations could not keep even that schedule. Only the *Borjomi* newspaper was the exception with its steady weekly issues. The emergence of *Samkhetis Karibche* with its regularly published issues created renewed demand for the print media in the local social life. Long intervals between the issues of local newspapers used to strip the press of its news and analytical aspects and made it impossible to meet the public's interest in the pressing issues of the day; this is why the need for the print media was

minimized. The local public got out of the habit of reading local newspapers and mainly read media products from the capital city or from Armenia.

The “hunger” for information was satisfied by the local electronic media which, compared to the print media, had much larger audience due to its better development level. The local TV and radio stations were better at finding information and supplying it to the public. In that situation, the newspapers’ role was yet further diminished. The launch of *Samk Bretis Karibche* sent a challenge even to the electronic media, especially as one of the most successful TV companies in Akhaltsikhe, *Lomsia*, was closed down when its broadcasting licence was revoked. *Samk Bretis Karibche* is published once a week.

The local public deems this newspaper a more reliable source from the point of view of information and analysis than the irregular news bulletins of the local TV channel. One of the participants in a focus group discussion in Akhaltsikhe said that he watched the channel only when he “was interested who passed away”.

The situation in Akhalkalaki is different: the print media cannot compete with the local TV company there. Participants in focus group discussions in Akhalkalaki thought the *Samk Bretis Karibche* newspaper more analytical and diverse than the television, which supplies concise descriptive information. But it also has to be noted that viewers like the local TV station’s talk shows and interviews (*Obiektivni* programme).

Attitudes toward the local print media vary in the region’s districts according to the newspapers’ distribution areas. The *Borjomi* newspaper is distributed in Borjomi, and the *Akhaltsikhe*, *Literaturuli Meskheti*, and *Meskhetis Universiteti* newspapers are distributed in Akhaltsikhe, Aspindza and Adigeni. In Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda, *Aspinjaki*, *Kachatuni* and *Akunk* are circulated. (The latter two are papers published by local nongovernmental organizations.) As was mentioned above, the *Samk Bretis Karibche* newspaper is the only periodical which is distributed in all of these districts. Demand for the paper is uniform across the territorial and ethnic divisions.

4.1.2 Channels of informing the public

Research has demonstrated that the priority channels of receiving reliable information and news are:

1. In Akhaltsikhe:
 - The *Samkhetis Karibche* newspaper
 - The *Metskbre Arkbi* TV company
 - The *Akhaltsikhe* newspaper
 - The *Mesketis Universiteti* newspaper
2. In Akhalkalaki:
 - The *ATV12* TV company
 - The *Samkhetis Karibche* newspaper
 - The *Kachatuni* newspaper
 - The *Akunk* newspaper
3. In Borjomi
 - The *Borjomi* TV company
 - The *Borjomi* newspaper
 - The *Samkhetis Karibche* newspaper

Newspapers from the Georgian capital and Armenia are also distributed in the region, and the nationwide TV channels are broadcast as well, of which the following media sources were identified using the criteria of trust and recognizability:

1. In Akhaltsikhe and Borjomi (predominantly ethnic Georgian-populated districts):
 - The *Imedi* TV company
 - The *Rustavi-2* TV company
 - The *Kviris Palitra* newspaper
 - The *Alia* newspaper
 - The *Asaval-Dasavali* newspaper
 - The *Mtsvane Talgha* Radio
 - *Radio Liberty*
 - The *Achava* TV company
2. In Akhalkalaki (predominantly ethnic Armenian-populated district):
 - The *Somkhetis Khma* newspaper
 - The *A1* TV company
 - The *Hairen* newspaper
 - The *Iravunk* newspaper

Citizens' awareness of the current problems in Samtskhe-Javakheti varies by district and by issue. In Meskheti, where the majority of the population is ethnic Georgian, the public has more information on the country's problems. They are more familiar with these common problems than with the positive and negative aspects of living in the region because they read newspapers from Tbilisi and watch Tbilisi-based *Imedi* and *Rustavi-2* TV-s.

In contrast to Meskheti, the population of Javakheti is more interested in what is going on in Armenia than in the developments in Georgia. There are many reasons for this: for years, TV channels from Tbilisi were not broadcast in Javakheti, and neither were the Georgian-language papers distributed there. The locals have poor command of the official language. They got accustomed to programmes of Armenian broadcasters and Armenian newspapers. Inefficiency of the regional administration resulted in the falling of the level of trust toward the state among the Armenian-speaking population. Emotional and kinship ties with neighbouring Armenia added to this. The situation has started to change lately. The *Imedi* TV company started to broadcast for Javakheti, while the Akhalkalaki TV station translates to Armenian and broadcasts news programmes of Tbilisi-based TV channels, *Moambe* (*Georgian Public Broadcasting*) and *Kurieri* (*Rustavi-2*).

As for public awareness of local problems, the papers are failing due to their small circulation and dragged-out intervals between issues. Some nongovernmental organizations used to combine this function with their main activities by familiarizing the public not only with their own activities and civil rights in their bulletins, but also with local problems.

The launch of the *Samkhetis Karibche* has changed the situation. Its issues are published regularly. It is produced in both Georgian and Armenian languages and reports on the region's most important problems. However, *Samkhetis Karibche* for now fails to replace products by the central Georgian and Armenian media sources with its own products in the local market. The problem is that the local public developed mistrust of the local newspapers over a long period of time. So, by inertia they still show interest in their old channels of information.

4.1.3 Free media and public expectations

In the towns where the study was conducted, public interest in local problems included the following areas:

- Reporting on the situation with the ethnic minorities' rights (Akhalkalaki, Borjomi);
- Reporting on issues related to the repatriation of Muslim Meskhetians (Akhalsikhe, Akhalkalaki);
- Monitoring of and reporting on the efficiency of the local authorities' efforts (Akhalkalaki, Akhalsikhe, Borjomi);
- Explaining of the goal of state social programmes and reporting on their implementation (Akhalsikhe, Akhalkalaki, Borjomi);
- Development of Georgian-Russian relations and their effect on local politics (Akhalkalaki);
- The Georgian central authorities' policy toward the Samtskhe-Javakheti region (Akhalkalaki);
- The state policy on the development of communications infrastructure and analysis of its social and economic outcomes (Akhalkalaki);
- Transparency of relations between the regional administration and local businesses (Akhalsikhe);
- Reporting on relations between the region's ethnic groups and historical heritage (Akhalkalaki, Akhalsikhe);
- Specifics of the region's economic development (lumber industry and oil pipeline) and their environmental consequences (Borjomi, Akhalsikhe);
- Explaining to the general public of the mission of international organizations operating in the region (as the public does not know what functions the international organizations perform in the region) and reporting on their activities (Akhalsikhe);
- Reporting on local cultural life (Borjomi, Akhalsikhe);
- Popularization of young arts people (Borjomi, Akhalsikhe).

The local media are open to these demands and report on them as much as they can. But there is a number of issues, especially political, historical, and ethno-cultural ones, which are reported on by newspapers from different districts of the region (depending on the ethnic composition of the district's population) with emphases

placed according to the ethno-nationalist discourse, not only lacking balance in coverage, but sometimes even showing no trace of it (this is true about both Georgian-language and Armenian-language periodicals, with rare exceptions, such as the *Aspinjaki* newspaper in Ninotsminda, whose views are indeed balanced). The *Samk Bretis Karibche* newspaper is trying to give all interested sides the possibility to voice their views when reporting on such issues; accordingly, this problem does not concern the paper.

The regional print media's coverage of the authorities' work, relations between the business sector and the regional administration, and social and economic problems is quite passive. It mostly limits itself to dry statements of facts and often does not show any interest at all in some issues or simply avoids them. The *Samk Bretis Karibche* newspaper is different from other media sources in this respect too as it actively reports on developments that follow the issue on which it has once already reported, places greater emphasis on analysis, and is trying to keep all pressing issues of public interest in focus. A participant in one of the focus group discussions in Akhaltsikhe in 2006 said:

“There is no serious problem, which has caused repercussions, which *Samk Bretis Karibche* would not report on; and it is covered in a serious way, without censorship... Whatever happens, they report. Effectively, *Samk Bretis Karibche* has filled up the vacuum which was created by closing of *Lomsia*.”

An important achievement of the paper is that it is not trying to draw public attention to it by sensation-mongering. The paper reports on acute problems sedately and thoughtfully. It is also important that the paper's readership likes *Samk Bretis Karibche's* working style and does not demand that the paper be excessively critical, which is an indicator of the correct public attitude toward the media. One of the participants in the focus group discussion, which was held in Akhaltsikhe in 2005, gave the following assessment to the level of satisfaction with the balanced nature of the paper:

“It is good when the opponents' positions are reported, which *Samk Bretis Karibche* does. For example, when the head of the local administration confronted the law enforcers over a lumber issue, the positions of both sides were reported.”

Readers who were interviewed in the towns of the region voiced a number of critical remarks regarding the papers' technical aspects and distribution. The local readers want the following aspects to be improved:

- The writing style, and proper use of the Georgian language;
- Print quality, photographs and design;
- The price of the newspaper is beyond the readers' means (one of the respondents said: "I have often seen people who could not afford the paper stand by the kiosk and read it there").

The distribution system was inefficient. During the focus group discussions in Akhaltsikhe in 2005, it was noted that subscribers not only could not receive their periodical on time (they talked about *Samkbrethis Karibche*), they could not receive it at all. The only way of getting an issue was buying it in a retail network. During the study conducted in Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki in 2006, several *Samkbrethis Karibche* subscribers did not express their displeasure in this respect.

4.1.4. Media and the authorities

Relations between the local authorities and the media are not conflict-ridden. After the revolution, the authorities have abandoned the practice which hitherto existed of funding formally independent media sources officially or indirectly. This has caused crises in many media sources. Some of the newspapers closed down, others are published rarely at irregular intervals. As for the economically self-sustaining media sources or recipients of financial aid from international organizations, the local authorities' relations with them are constructive, and no one from among the interviewed respondents has cited facts of violations of human rights or refusal of releasing public information. The authorities always invite journalists to the events they stage and do not hinder the media's functioning in the region.

In the opinion of some participants in the focus group discussions in Akhaltsikhe in 2006, the authorities are liberal toward the local media because they are not interested in what is written in the region, for what matters is what assessment is given to their work in the central media. Accordingly, the importance of the local media's function to establish a link between the authorities and the public is diminished.

4.2 The *Samkhretis Karibche* newspaper

4.2.1 Organizational development of the *Samkhretis Karibche* newspaper and assistance from international donor organizations

The paper was founded in June 2004 under the *Regional Media Development and Public Accountability* project. Initially, the paper was registered as a limited liability company and its founders were the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* (London/Tbilisi) with 52% share, the *Javakheti Media Development Association* (Akhalkalaki) with 24% share, and the *Samtskhe-Javakheti Centre for Civil Initiative* (Akhalsikhe) with 24% share. In May-June 2005, taking into account the situation in the local market, the form of ownership was changed and the paper was transformed into the *Samkhretis Karibche Union* nongovernmental organization.

The editorial office of the *Samkhretis Karibche* newspaper is based in two towns, Akhalsikhe and Akhalkalaki. At present, the Board of *Samkhretis Karibche* is in charge of general management of the paper. It includes four representatives each from the *Javakheti Media Development Association* and the *Samtskhe-Javakheti Centre for Civil Initiative* and one representative of the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, who coordinates the paper's editorial policy. Initially, assistance was provided not only in financial and technical matters, but also in professional development of journalists and editors and by controlling the paper's quality. When the professional level and work quality of the paper's editorial staff reached a certain level in 2006, this type of assistance was discontinued.

The *Institute for War and Peace Reporting's* activities in founding and functioning of the *Samkhretis Karibche* newspaper unfolded in the following directions:

- Creating acceptable organizational structure for the partner non-governmental organizations which participated in the founding of the newspaper and ensuring that the paper is operational;
- Mobilizing local human resources with journalistic experience to staff the paper's editorial and journalistic positions;
- Professional (editorial, managerial, journalistic) development of the new staff;

- Development of marketing skills;
- Creating distribution network and passing knowledge in that area to the paper's editorial office.

Measures aiming at setting up the *Samkhetis Karibche* newspaper were productive, although some problems arose in its organizational structure. The two editorial offices (in Akhalkalaki and Akhaltsikhe) were to be in equal decision-making conditions. Discussions on how to implement the editorial policy created much controversy. The *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* managed to overcome the discord between the two editorial offices. The editorial offices proved to be able to operate properly, but the Akhalkalaki editorial staff was displeased which resulted in the lack of initiative and a passive attitude on their part. The Akhaltsikhe office was active in seeking information and writing articles, which the Akhalkalaki office did not do. As a result, the balance was disturbed (half of the paper materials was supposed to be produced by the Akhaltsikhe editorial office and another half – by the Akhalkalaki office) between materials provided by the two editorial offices. (It also has to be taken into account that the Akhaltsikhe office covers four districts, whereas the Akhalkalaki office covers two.) In 2006, the leadership of the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* considered it inexpedient to finance the Akhalkalaki editorial office as a separate structural unit and subordinated it to the Akhaltsikhe office. This structural change made the paper's work easier and relations with journalists – more organized and coordinated; the volume of materials received from Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda has also increased.

In 2004-2005, the *Samkhetis Karibche* easily drew the local public's attention against the backdrop of the small media sector and experienced dynamic growth in popularity. Its reports on different issues would get in the focus of public attention and trigger the authorities' reaction. There were cases when the issues that were raised by the paper would get resolved; for example, when a letter was published on severed water supply at one of the kindergartens in Akhaltsikhe, the authorities resolved the problem the next day. During focus group discussions in Akhaltsikhe in 2005-2006, many similar examples were cited. So, *Samkhetis Karibche* commands great public trust. However, it has to be noted that during the research in

Akhalkalaki, participants in focus group discussions were unable to recall similar examples of the authorities' reaction to newspaper articles.

The number of the paper's subscribers increased, reaching more than 500 in 2006. Its sales also grew. Among the subscribers are both ordinary citizens and the local authorities. Together with residents of urban areas, some 200 residents of villages are also among the subscribers. The growing sales resulted both in increase in the number of subscribers and growth in *Samkbreitis Karibche's* circulation and, if in 2004 its circulation was 1,000, by now it is 2,000.

The rise in the paper's circulation is a result of its recognizability and growing public trust. This, in turn, is an outcome of correct formulation of *Samkbreitis Karibche's* editorial policy. With expert assistance from the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, *Samkbreitis Karibche* increased its journalistic level, broadened its coverage and separated topics into individual rubrics, which enabled it to create a product which was interesting for the public. The editorial office works in the following main directions:

- Social problems and reporting on the work of appropriate government departments;
- Functioning of the local self-government and reporting on circumstances which affect its efficiency;
- The region's economic development, and monitoring and assessment of the government policy in that area;
- Reporting on problems of ethnic and religious minorities and protection of their rights, as well as focusing on human rights issues in general.

The achieved success was followed by increase in the paper's revenues, which did not depend solely on sales and subscriptions. When *Samkbreitis Karibche* became recognizable and the public started to read it, local businessmen and international organizations operating in the region began to place commercial and social advertisements in the paper. This, of course, increased the revenues; the paper started to independently organize and finance some activities, pay office expenses and partially cover Internet service fees, although all this is still not enough to ensure the paper's economic sustainability. Assistance from international and donor organizations is still needed. Since Sep-

tember 2006, financial assistance from the Dutch donor organization Press Now, has also promoted the stability of *Samkbreṭis Karibche*'s functioning. (The *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* played a major role in securing this assistance for the paper.) The Dutch partner's assistance will last three years and will be aimed at unhindered publication of the paper and building of the distribution network.

Samkbreṭis Karibche has no problems with the local authorities. The local authorities themselves approve of the paper's work because the paper has made it possible to receive feedback from the public. Articles published by the newspaper on regional problems have many times triggered some government action. In addition, the paper's openness to all the sides interested in the reported problems enables the authorities to state their opinion and respond to their opponents.

The paper has never been denied a comment if it requested some department of the local authorities to make one. *Samkbreṭis Karibche* did not encounter difficulties in receiving public information in 2005-2006; the only difficulty was relations with the local department of the Internal Affairs Ministry. However, whenever the paper publishes a critical article or when the article is about the police, the department does comment on this.

Samkbreṭis Karibche is trying to make its articles as balanced as possible. This is why it asks not only opponents to voice their opinions on a certain issue, but also experts who do not represent an interested party. Both experts from Tbilisi and representatives of the local university and nongovernmental sector may be interviewed.

In general, more balanced reporting is a result of growing professional level of the paper's journalists. Under the *Regional Media Development and Public Accountability* project, the editor of the Tbilisi-based *24 Saati* newspaper worked with *Samkbreṭis Karibche*. He helped the paper to structure its work process in accordance with the principles of journalistic ethics and standards and formulate a better editorial policy. As a result, not only did the published articles become more balanced, but also the quality of the paper's content improved and criteria for selecting issues for print were formulated (how pressing they are and whether they generate public interest). At present, the paper's editorial office (in Akhaltsikhe) does not

experience shortage of materials. Moreover, often it is difficult to fit all the articles into the paper's eight pages; so only the most important articles go to print. Usually, some 10 to 12 items are published in each issue (written by both Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki editorial offices).

The paper regularly publishes articles from the regional newspapers participating in the *Regional Media Development and Public Accountability* project (*Khalkhis Gazeti* in Gori, *Gazeti Batumelebi* in Batumi, *Akhali Gazeti* in Kutaisi, and *Spektri* in Gurjaani) and from the periodicals that were founded under the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* aegis (*Panorama*, published in Tbilisi and Sokhumi, and *CRS – Caucasus Reporting Service*).

The *Samkhetis Karibche* newspaper looks to develop new journalistic cadres too. For this purpose, it closely cooperates with the linguistics and journalism schools of Akhaltsikhe University.

The *Samkhetis Karibche* has the executive director, two chief editors (one each for the Georgian-language and the Armenian-language issues), one designer, two translators, and 14 journalists (including two photographers).

The paper is equipped with four computers, two scanners, two printers, two digital cameras, six voice recorders and one diesel generator.

4.2.2. Public demand and *Samkhetis Karibche's* editorial policy

The *Samkhetis Karibche* newspaper is highly trusted by the public. The paper is the only region-wide periodical and accordingly, the only medium to promptly react to the developments in the region. In addition, thanks to high journalistic professionalism achieved in 2004-2006, the paper's editorial policy produces a media product which meets public demand. However, readers do criticize the paper's work in certain areas. For example, in the focus group discussions in Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki in 2005 and 2006, criticism was voiced regarding the coverage of the region's historical past and religious issues. The point is that materials on these issues by journalists from two offices (Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki) usually appear in the same paper. Readers from Akhaltsikhe deem opinions by journalists

from Akhalkalaki a nationalist propaganda and vice versa, readers from Akhalkalaki think the same about articles by Akhaltsikhe journalists. In readers' opinion, *Samkhetis Karibche's* coverage of the local authorities' work, relations between socio-political groups and the authorities, business environment and social issues is quite balanced. They are pleased with the fact that:

“In the previous period (before 2004), the press and TV coverage of problems was always based on someone's concrete interests, whereas this is not true for *Samkhetis Karibche* and its journalists who neither chase sensations nor sing paeans to anyone... We are tired of that type of papers.”⁶

Readers also like the paper's ability not to avoid pressing issues of public interest and not to hush up some issues out of fear of the authorities:

“Previously (until *Samkhetis Karibche* was founded), no one was interested who we were and what problems we had; it was as if everything was all right here, no one bothered us and we were happy... Now we know that we can get our message across to the state. The possibility appeared to write if something is happening and know that someone who can resolve the problem will read it.”⁷

One of the important results which readers also mention in their assessments of *Samkhetis Karibche's* work is that the paper gave an opportunity to residents of different districts of the region to know one another's problems:

“It is interesting that with the paper's (*Samkhetis Karibche*) help, I can now picture how people whom I used to think of as strangers live. Now I know what is going on in the region, outside my town... In short, it is as if the region is now smaller, and now I am not only a resident of Borjomi, but also of Akhalkalaki or Adigeni.”⁸

⁶ Opinion of one of the participants in focus group discussion in Akhaltsikhe in 2005.

⁷ Opinion of one of the participants in focus group discussion in Akhalkalaki in 2006.

⁸ Opinion of one of the participants in the focus group discussion in Borjomi in 2006.

4.2.3. *Samkhetis Karibche's* role in the region's public life

Samkhetis Karibche's role in the social and political life of the Samtskhe-Javakheti region is certainly significant. The paper's involvement in the *Regional Media Development and Public Accountability* project has raised substantially the level of professional development of the staff and also facilitated diversification of the staff's professional skills. (The paper's journalists are former staffers of the region's leading nongovernmental organizations.) This has enhanced *Samkhetis Karibche's* capability to quickly and efficiently respond to public demand and report on current developments. Of course, this sets it apart from other local media sources in terms of its social significance.

It follows that the paper is capable of performing the following functions:

- Acting as a mediator and a channel of communication between the public and the authorities;
- Creating and developing a communications network between different social groups or local communities;
- Reporting on discourses existing in the region's different ethnic and religious communities; creating and developing an environment for public debate and discussions;
- Popularizing the ideas of civil society, ensuring ties between civil society institutions and the Samtskhe-Javakheti society and thereby contributing to the region's civil development.

4.2.4 Influence of *Samkhetis Karibche* on local media development

The *Samkhetis Karibche* newspaper is effectively the first independent media source which started to cover the entire region. Before, neither the print nor electronic media had experience of working at the region-wide level. From this point of view, the founding of *Samkhetis Karibche* started a new phase of development in the regional media sector.

If before the launch of the *Regional Media Development and Public Accountability* project in Samtskhe-Javakheti, the issue of freedom of the local media was not straightforward, an opposite situation is

taking shape today. Despite the fact that the paper's history is short, *Samkbreṭis Karibche's* style and vector of work and the relevant experience that the paper has accumulated has become worth sharing with other media sources not only in Samtskhe-Javakheti, but also in other regions of Georgia. Close cooperation with the Tbilisi-based *24 Saati* newspaper and other regional newspapers has made it possible to provide accurate reporting in the capital city and in the rest of Georgia on the processes in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region (and vice versa).

It is also *Samkbreṭis Karibche's* contribution to the development of the local media sector that its cooperation with the linguistics and journalistic faculties of the local university allows for the development of professional and highly qualified journalistic resources for the regional media. The cooperation helps young journalists in developing professional skills and in sharing modern journalistic standards and ethical norms, which have already established themselves in *Samkbreṭis Karibche*, at the very early stages of their careers. This means that other local media sources will also have better-trained staff.

5. SHIDA KARTLI

5.1 The state of the free media and their role in the region's public life

5.1.1 Media development overview

The independent free media in the town of Gori, the administrative centre of the Shida Kartli region, are represented by three organizations. One of them is an electronic media source, the *Trialeti* TV company, and the remaining two are print media sources, the *Trialeti*⁹ newspaper and the *Kbalkhis Gazeti* newspaper. Their degree of independence is quite high, especially that of the print media. The local administration still influences the tone of the TV company one way or another. Compared to the television and radio, the papers have greater freedom when reporting on problematic issues. The degree of independence of the local print media sources is also different. This depends on the owner's relations with the local administration. In local analysts' opinion, the *Trialeti* newspaper is an example of this:

“There was a time when the paper was loyal to the authorities. The paper has many talented journalists, and they had some sense of protest against that kind of an attitude toward the authorities... The degree of the paper's independence was rising in direct correlation with the deepening of the conflict between the paper's owner and the authorities (namely, the Shida Kartli governor).”

The *Trialeti* newspaper's journalists started to send their critical articles to the media sources in Tbilisi instead of printing them in their newspaper as a result of this situation. Of the newspapers in the capital city, *Akhali Versia* cooperated with some journalists from Gori, whose articles stood out for their great impact both in Tbilisi and in Gori. Unfortunately, this tactic could not provide protection for these journalists. Journalist Saba Tsitsikashvili, who has many times been put under pressure, can be cited as an example of this.

⁹ The *Trialeti* TV and radio company and the *Trialeti* newspaper have the same owner. The paper was founded in 2003 by the TV company.

As for the television, when the conflict between the regional administration and the station's owner allayed, the company became more or less loyal to the authorities. Its reporting becomes more critical from time to time, when relations between the sides get strained or if the governor's office raises the issue of changing the form of ownership of the media source.

The local administration also put pressure on correspondents of some central media sources. This is why the local public is interested in the development of the free media and the emergence of information sources that would provide an alternative to the local administration's official sources. The local papers have their readership; their audience is distributed more or less evenly among the papers. The difference between them is that *Khalkhis Gazeti* has a slightly more oppositionist readership which tends to mistrust the authorities, whereas the *Trialeti* newspaper is read by people with a more moderate political position.

The degree to which papers are pro-opposition or pro-government, or critical or loyalist, varies depending on the issue they cover. *Khalkhis Gazeti* is very critical and less accommodating when reporting on contraband-related issues. In an article on this subject, the paper exposed the facts of storing contraband by close relatives of a high-level official in the regional administration and accused the Gori Financial Police Department and its head personally of turning a blind eye to such facts. Representatives of local nongovernmental organizations said that in contrast to *Khalkhis Gazeti*, other media sources in Gori choose to limit themselves to just stating facts when reporting on smuggling, even when these types of occurrences are exposed.

The following are viewed as positive aspects of the newspapers functioning in Gori:

- Prompt reaction to regional developments;
- Consideration for the public interest when reporting on current problems;
- Close cooperation with the nongovernmental sector;
- Firm and more or less consistent adherence to the civic values;
- Resolving of disputes with the regional administration through legal channels, namely, the courts; coverage of these disputes on

the newspapers' pages also facilitates popularization of civic culture;

- Realization and inclusion in the action plan of the need for more balance in reporting and analysis, training of the journalistic staff in this area, and increasing its professional level.

It is precisely in the latter area that *Khalkhis Gazeti's* progress in the last two years is clearly noticeable. Its output has been increasingly balanced and accurate. The paper often approaches local nongovernmental organizations for legal advice on how an article should be written on legal issues. The journalists' writing style is changing after they get qualified advice.

Despite the growing professional level, the problems with the content are still pressing in both newspapers, as well as in all Georgian newspapers. For example, *Khalkhis Gazeti* prints articles by journalists from Tskhinvali, which call for streamlining of the editorial policy, especially this relates to articles on interethnic relations. Phrases like "the Georgians have licked off the Ossetian blood from themselves" can be encountered in those articles. In the opinion of local readers and representatives of the nongovernmental sector, articles written in this vein are certainly not conducive to building trust between the two ethnic communities in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone.

The analysis of the region's media products clearly shows that the coverage of religious issues by the local papers is low. Against the backdrop of a long-standing confrontation between the Orthodox and Catholic communities in Gori, the media do not print any other materials but occasional reports on Orthodox festivities and the history of Orthodoxy. Issues of harassment on religious grounds and discrimination against children are both unreported. This raises doubts that these issues are avoided deliberately. One local analyst said:

"Journalists have often told me in private conversations that they cannot write on religion without their priest's blessing... The facts of discrimination against religious minorities, which I work on, unfortunately do not get on the newspapers' pages. A dispute between the Orthodox and Catholic communities over the church building has not been properly covered by the paper,

which mainly stated just one side's views. Naturally, the television does not report on these issues at all.”

By avoiding certain issues, the media violate the norms of journalistic ethics. But the issue is so sensitive that this approach might even have some positive effect, in other words, it prevents deepening of the religious conflict within society.

Despite the journalists' activity and the management's efforts, the papers' commercial success is still questionable. Although the issue's cost varies from 30 to 40 tetri, customers still cannot afford it. As it stands at present, the newspapers are in demand, but customers lack the wherewithal. Local officials are frequent readers, as they are particularly interested in the media's assessment of their work and in the media coverage of the local authorities' efforts in different areas.

The distribution system is not functioning smoothly everywhere. *Khalkbis Gazeti* has greater difficulties with the dissemination of its editions than does *Trialeti*. The reason for this is the difference in available resources. The *Trialeti* newspaper was founded by the *Trialeti* broadcasting company and has the possibility to use the latter's human, financial and technical resources. In addition, the broadcasting company advertises the newspaper.

5.1.2 Channels of informing the public

The study shows that priority channels of receiving reliable information and news are:

1. The *Trialeti* broadcasting company;
2. The *Trialeti* newspaper;
3. The *Khalkbis Gazeti* newspaper;
4. The *Goris Moambe* newspaper.

According to interviewed respondents, both electronic and print media are equally reliable. Television is quicker to report the developments, whereas the papers are better at raising and analyzing problems. These two media complement each other.

Together with the local media sources, the sources with nationwide coverage are also seen as information sources. Respondents clearly prefer the electronic media (the *Imedi* TV, *Imedi* radio, *Rustavi 2* TV, *Mtsvane Talgha* radio, *Radio Liberty*, *Fortuna* radio) to the print

ones. To stay abreast of the developments in the country, the public reads the Tbilisi press (*Kviris Palitra*, *Asaval-Dasavali*, *Georgian Times*, *Akhali Versia*, *24 Saati*, *Alia*, *Rezonansi*). They rely on local press to learn about the developments in Shida Kartli itself, while the Tbilisi-based newspapers are considered more reliable sources of information on the processes that are under way in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict zone and the Tskhinvali region.

A substantial proportion of readers prefer *Khalkhis Gazeti* to other newspapers printed in Gori for its ability to better convey the public's displeasure with politics. In readers' opinion, the degree of freedom in the paper is greater compared to the *Trialeti* newspaper. The latter has a parliament member from the National Movement as one of its founders, which in itself is already a reason for some extent of mistrust toward the paper. The tone of *Trialeti's* journalists is quite different when they write for other papers. Local analysts say that the governor often telephones the paper's editorial office and the TV company's office, which means that the journalists are subject to pressure and therefore not free enough. The regional administration reacts to every phrase about the governor. The aforementioned Saba Tsitsikashvili's criticism of the governor ended up in his demotion from the post of editor to an ordinary journalistic post. Journalists are often put under pressure not by the officials themselves, but by the owner or editor of the media source. The latter are directly influenced by the regional administration.

The situation with *Khalkhis Gazeti* is completely different. The editor spares no effort to avert pressure from the journalists. There have been many instances of threats and settling of scores with him, including arrest on unsubstantiated charges. It is clear that the paper has an oppositionist attitude toward the authorities, which shows in its content. Some readers like *Khalkhis Gazeti's* work, but others find the extremely pro-opposition tone and scathing criticism unacceptable:

“We might have some reservations about *Khalkhis Gazeti* because I prefer to listen to both sides... Sometimes it is conspicuous that the paper blatantly accuses the governor without sufficient evidence, which subtracts from impartiality.”

A large proportion of the population cannot afford buying newspapers and tend to watch the television more. As already mentioned, *Khalkbis Gazeti* is read by circles with oppositionist views. The extent and geographical area of the paper's distribution are limited. Financial conditions of many of its potential readers are just as strained. In addition, in light of its confrontation with the regional administration, it is difficult for the paper to go outside Gori, where the district and village administrations hinder subscription. The *Trialeti* newspaper operates in completely different circumstances and has regular subscribers in the district and village administrations.

5.1.3 Free media and public expectations

The public's sentiments and requirements for the local media are not uniform. To some participants in focus group discussions held in March and December 2005, the clear-cut oppositionist views of the media are acceptable, to others, they are not. The recognizability of the print media sources and the level of trust in them depend on their pro-government or pro-opposition slant. It has to be said that in December 2005, a greater number of respondents noted that it was more important to them to get a balanced analysis from the media than cautious and measured or overly politically biased comments. They said:

“Journalists are supposed to supply accurate and impartial information to the media. It is up to us to analyze it, so their personal attitude should not be reported. Unfortunately, our papers and TV companies are private companies and have private owners. In my opinion, reports make it clear, directly or indirectly, what the owner's attitude is toward a particular individual or entity and toward the authorities in general.”

In the opinion of respondents who fall under this category, journalists need to grow professionally, adopt the professional ethics and develop civic self-consciousness. Unfortunately, the economic context in the region makes journalists take an acquiescent position and turn a blind eye to problems. It is not an easy decision for a journalist to lose a job for the sake of principles or because of a confrontation with the editorial office. To do so, the journalist has

to have a guarantee of finding another job in the same field. So if such journalists ever existed in the region, it was only because they had the possibility to pursue some other line of work as well.

Some of the respondents consider informal channels of spreading news an alternative source of information:

“The town is small, and there are other sources of information; we can see ourselves who is doing what in the town, and we analyze this ourselves.”

As for the requirements for the local media, respondents interviewed during the study expressed the following:

- The media should stick to the principle of respect for personal dignity. There was an incident whereby a person was accused of committing a crime in a television report on a police operation. Eventually, that person proved to be innocent, but no one was called to account for the report;
- The media should use only verified and double-checked information and should be responsible for the accuracy of its reports;
- The media should adhere to the principle of balancing the information and analysis, be free from biased interpretation, and provide equal opportunities to all involved sides of expressing their opinion on a given issue.

In many respondents’ opinion, to improve the media products, their technical and content parameters need to be improved:

- The papers should become visually appealing to customers;
- Headlines have to be written with more caution, prudence, and consistency with the article’s content;
- The papers should be less heavily political. They should cover a wide range of topics and run more rubrics;
- The journalists’ professional level needs to be improved; most of all, journalists violate the norms of ethical journalism;
- The price of the print media should be affordable to the local readership.

5.1.4 Media and the authorities

The Shida Kartli administration has not changed much after the Rose Revolution compared to the previous period. Public availability

of the information has not been fully ensured yet. New staff was appointed to public service agencies, but they need retraining and experience. Local analysts say that they are not familiar with the legal aspects of the functioning of the public service and have little knowledge of the legislative framework which defines their functions and responsibilities. Releasing the information which legally should be available to the public is often hindered by a particular civil servant not so much deliberately, but because of their lack of knowledge of relevant procedures and the absence of bureaucratic ethics.

Both the violations of human rights and the abuse of power take place because of the aforementioned factors. Even when the local media are not impartial and openly violate the norms of journalistic ethics, representatives of the authorities, instead of calling them to account as required by law, are trying to settle personal scores or issue threats.

In this situation, journalists of the local newspapers seek support from the local and central media and nongovernmental or international organizations. In Gori, representatives of the *Georgian Young Lawyers' Association* and *Liberty Institute* are playing a supportive role. They not only protect journalists' rights, but also provide continuous legal consulting to them on different aspects of relations with the authorities. In addition, by carrying out joint awareness campaigns and including journalists in different civic education programmes, they provide the media organizations with the opportunity to develop their own capacity and boost their effect on the local authorities.

From the point of view of politicization and partiality of the media, the aforementioned problems can be explained not only by the specifics of the media development in Shida Kartli, but also by the local authorities' lack of interest in establishing rapport with the local media and through the latter's influence, with the public. Sometimes the local authorities hold news conferences on particular issues and invite representatives of the Georgian central media, at the same time completely ignoring local journalists and editors. Naturally, it is difficult for the local media to report on the issue without the information from the primary source in this situation. In addition, the authorities get an excellent opportunity to criticize the media.

5.2 The *Khalkhis Gazeti* newspaper

5.2.1 Assistance from international donor organizations and *Khalkhis Gazeti's* organizational development

Before the launch of the assistance programme by the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, the paper's main problem was ensuring unhindered release of its issues. The revenues of *Khalkhis Gazeti* alone were insufficient for dealing with the problem. The funding which the paper started to receive after its involvement in the *Georgian Regional Media Development and Public Accountability* project (it was sufficient to pay the salaries to the paper's staff) enabled the paper's editorial office to mobilize its own financial resources to increase the paper's page count and resolve the problem of the issue regularity. As a result of the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting's* assistance, the paper's page count rose to 12 pages. Sometimes, when many pressing issues are to be discussed, even 16-page issues are printed (before, the paper had eight pages). The regularity of issues also fell into a stable pattern, and the paper is published once a week, with no failures in 2004 and 2005. The higher page count also had an effect on *Khalkhis Gazeti's* retail price: if before, the paper cost 25 tetri, after its involvement in the project and the aforementioned changes, the paper's price reached 40 tetri. Another factor that contributed to the increase in the paper's page count was the editorial office's efforts to establish business relations with local nongovernmental organizations and the university, which produce supplements to reports on their activities and pay for the newspaper space.

As part of technical assistance under the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* project, an A3 format printer, a personal computer and a digital still camera were handed over to *Khalkhis Gazeti*. In addition, a reliable Internet connection was installed during the project and *Khalkhis Gazeti's* web page was also developed. All this substantially facilitated the workflow in the newspaper and accordingly, improved its technical quality as well. At present, the paper is equipped with three personal computers, three printers, a scanner, three voice recorders and a digital still camera.

Taking into account the paper's needs, the editor attended a series of training courses on the management issues (as no institutional separation of the editorial and managerial functions have taken place in the newspaper), which facilitated the process of planning and managing the paper. The training course in management resulted in the journalists' specialization in different areas of expertise (which translated into the paper's rubrics and their regularity). The paper's design became more professional during the project. As for the *Khalkhis Gazeti's* journalistic staff, they attended training courses in the following areas:

- Investigative journalism;
- Reporting on economic issues;
- Promotion and establishment of journalistic standards and ethics in the work process;
- Reporting on the local self-government's work and elections.

With help of the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, the paper managed to establish contacts with other international organizations and take part in events organized by organizations promoting media development. Of these, the most important was attending the training courses. One of the important partners of the newspaper is IREX, to which *Khalkhis Gazeti* became an interesting partner.

The experience which the paper acquired during the project undoubtedly had a great influence on the paper's content, but it did not produce the effect which was demonstrated by other regional media sources which participated in the project. One of the reasons for this was the failure to institutionally separate the editorial, marketing and managerial functions, which resulted in an unequal distribution of work time commitment among the staff. This affected both the management and marketing quality and the editorial work. In addition, the paper failed to keep the professional and highly qualified staff, who had attended training courses. The journalistic staff changed frequently, which slowed down the improvement of the paper's content and increased the editor's workload. (The style and compliance of the articles with the norms of journalistic ethics had to be under permanent control.) The editor's attempts to separate the functions from the marketing standpoint yielded no results. The person who worked on this issue and in whom some resources

were invested for his professional development moved over to the *Trialeti* TV company. So the paper's editor had to shoulder this burden too.

These reasons account for the slow pace of the paper's development. The implementation of the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting's* plans to increase the paper's circulation by broadening the geographic area of distribution and increasing the number of subscribers, and to make the organization economically more viable by attracting advertisers remains problematic.

At present, *Khalkbis Gazeti* has the same circulation as it had at the beginning of the project, varying from 500 to 700. Of these, 100 were initially distributed in Tbilisi (among nongovernmental organizations, embassies, and government agencies with help of the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*). The number of subscribers in the towns of Shida Kartli is 170 in Gori, 80 in Kaspi, and 70 in Khashuri. The remaining part of the circulation is sold in the retail network, and most of it is sold out.

As a result of training courses conducted by the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, the paper started to write on a wider range of topics, the articles are arranged into permanent rubrics, the design has improved a great deal. *Khalkbis Gazeti* started to print reports from the conflict zone: articles are forwarded to the paper from its own correspondent in the town of Tskhinvali.

The permanent rubrics of *Khalkbis Gazeti* include: Medicine, Agriculture, Politics, Society, Region, Law, Economy. The paper also prints articles by other regional papers which participate in the project (and vice versa, supplies them with its materials).

The paper's editorial policy is aimed at achieving balance in reporting, although there is still a lot to be done in this respect. The editor demands that journalists finish their assigned jobs on time and in a correct manner, double-checking the information and diversifying the sources of information. The editor advises his staff to avoid inappropriate statements:

"The main advantage of our paper is that there is no censorship in this paper. The only censorship is that inappropriate statements must be avoided. However, I myself made inappropriate statements about the governor, though I took responsibility for them."

The paper's personnel includes the chief editor, a proofreader, a designer, a technical staffer, a bookkeeper, six journalists and a news photographer, as well as correspondents in Khashuri, Kaspi, Kareli and Tskhinvali.

5.2.2. *Kbalkhis Gazeti's* editorial policy and public demand

As mentioned above, the local readership's attitude toward *Kbalkhis Gazeti* is not uniform: to some, the paper's working style and slant are acceptable, to others it is not. The paper has found its audience and taken its niche in the local public space of discussion and information. The paper's editorial policy is aimed at remaining in this niche, winning over more readers and taking into account its interest. For this purpose, the editorial office is introducing feedback mechanisms. The opinion and demands of the public are inferred from their letters to the editorial office. Letters from readers are different: some readers encourage and promise support to the editorial office, others advise which topic the paper should report on, and the majority complain about or criticize the local authorities for violating their rights or interests. The letters of the latter two categories play an important role in the paper's editorial policy. First, they make it possible to take into account the readers' interests, and second, they provide information for future reports or features. The readers can see their contribution to *Kbalkhis Gazeti's* work and are pleased that the editorial office reacts quickly to their letters. This consolidates the positive attitude toward the newspaper.

Kbalkhis Gazeti's readers like the editor's uncompromising position in reporting on the region's pressing issues, especially toward the local government bodies. It has to be said that by uncompromising, the interviewed respondents did not mean a critical attitude as an end in itself. What they like is that whenever representatives of the local government bodies violate the law or abuse their authority, the paper can launch a campaign or resort to the court, which has happened many times. Respondents say that the paper does not go for deals with the persons or organizations involved. As was noted at one of the meetings of the participants in focus

group discussions, the editor often receives such offers, but the paper reports all instances of it coming under pressure and follows the principle of openness.

Gori is a small town. Its residents know very well both the people about whom the paper writes and those who print the newspaper. In the course of a study of public trust toward *Khalkhis Gazeti*, respondents emphasized their personal trust in the editor and journalists. The criticism toward *Khalkhis Gazeti*, which was voiced by some respondents and was discussed above (in section 5.1.3), also stemmed from the context of the respondents' personal acquaintance and contacts with the persons who were mentioned in the newspaper's articles. Accordingly, the dividing line between the high degree of trust toward *Akhali Gazeti* and the unacceptability of the paper coincides with the line between the different positions and views within the local public.

Those readers who like the paper's style and its slant voice their regret over the lack of reaction from appropriate bodies to the problems raised in the newspaper:

“Another problem is that although the paper does print articles on problems, there is no reaction to them. For example, the problem of installing electric metres in the town is a pressing one. The paper writes about this, but the problem is not being dealt with.”

Respondents realize, however, that the paper cannot resolve such issues and that this is an instance of general lack of communication between the local authorities and the public.

Those participants in the focus groups discussions who read *Khalkhis Gazeti* reaffirmed their trust toward the paper and noted that they find it acceptable in terms of its content, but at the same time they advised the paper:

- To print issues in colour; be of the Tbilisi-base *Kviris Palitra* format; add more educational and entertainment reports;
- To simplify the paper's language; to write on medical and agricultural issues in a language understandable to the readers;
- To allocate some paper space to the history of Gori, especially its past and its sports traditions;

- To produce a children's page or supplement; there are many children's hobby groups in Gori, and reporting on their events would broaden the paper's readership;
- To put up bulletin boards in public places for fresh issues of the newspaper because many people cannot afford buying it despite being interested.

Some of the participants in the discussion noted that the diversification of the covered topics would increase the page count, which would result in a higher issue price and make it more difficult to sell the circulation. It was noted in reply that although *Kviris Palitra* is expensive, it is sold nonetheless. The following opinion was also voiced:

“Perhaps there is no need to increase the page count; if they write one good and in-depth article on one political event instead of five articles, then there will be room left for other rubrics as well.”

5.2.2 *Khalkhis Gazeti's* role in the region's public life

Khalkhis Gazeti certainly plays an important social role against the backdrop of secretive Shida Kartli regional governance. Its awareness campaigns make the local public more informed and increase the level of civic activity. After the involvement in the *Georgian Regional Media Development and Public Accountability* project, the paper's contribution to the intensification of civic activity has increased. Its cooperation with international organizations, and first and foremost, with the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, enabled it to take reporting on the regional developments far beyond the local scene. Accordingly, the instances of putting pressure on the paper became rarer. The paper is uncompromising in its service of the cause of developing political and legal culture of society. In close cooperation with local nongovernmental organizations, *Khalkhis Gazeti's* efforts in this direction have become even more massive. Although the critical tone toward the authorities did not mitigate, the improved investigative and social journalism skills helped the paper raise the existing problems in a more clear-cut way.

Khalkhis Gazeti has been reporting on the violation of human rights and the abuse of power by the local police even more actively. A series of articles was devoted to the instances of illegal arrests, light was shed on several cases which hitherto had been unknown to the public. One of these cases was the detention of a Gori resident on charge of carrying a firearm illegally, although the witnesses of body search themselves did not confirm his guilt. (Witnesses did not want to sign the fabricated search protocol.) The paper made this case public and helped release that person through an information campaign in cooperation with nongovernmental organizations.

In the recent period, the paper started to write more often on detentions of local businessmen and their release after plea-bargaining. The discussion in the newspaper on the process of the nationalization of the Gori market a few years ago caused a major stir. Under the influence of a campaign, which was staged by *Khalkhis Gazeti* and local nongovernmental organizations specializing in protection of human rights, the case was returned to court and settled in favour of the previous owner of the market. The judge annulled the contract, which was signed by the state and the owner with violations of procedures. *Khalkhis Gazeti* reported on the process in detail throughout, and the readers closely followed it.

5.2.3 *Khalkhis Gazeti's* influence on the development of the local media sector

It is difficult to talk about the direct influence of *Khalkhis Gazeti* on the development of the local media sector. The periodical lags far behind its rival *Trialeti* in terms of its technical, financial and human resources.

However, from the standpoint of the development of free journalism, it certainly is a major contributor. The paper's editor used to work for the *Trialeti* newspaper, which he left on the grounds of disagreement with its editorial policy. *Khalkhis Gazeti* was subsequently founded, and the paper started to gather journalists who left other media sources in Gori. People who did not agree with the style and

pattern of their organizations often joined the newspaper. *Kbalkhis Gazeti* had a serious potential of becoming a strong media source, but it could not keep its staff because of its limited financial resources.

Despite its organizational weakness, the paper is undoubtedly playing an important role in shaping civil discourse. Its articles on different pressing social issues act as a catalyst of broadening the discussion. Many an article that the paper has printed had given an incentive to civil society organizations to step up their efforts. The paper has had the experience of cooperation with the civil sector from the moment of its founding.

Kbalkhis Gazeti is an impartial tribune for the nongovernmental sector and a reliable partner in different events organized by NGOs. By working together, they play the role of a civil educator of the local public and make a major contribution to raising civic awareness and political and legal consciousness.

6. KVEMO KARTLI AND SAMEGRELO-ZEMO SVANETI¹⁰

Kvemo Kartli (towns of Gardabani and Marneuli) and Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti (towns of Zugdidi, Senaki and Poti) were selected as target regions based on the following criteria:

- The region's problems are pressing (part of Samegrelo borders on the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict zone);
- The region has large ethnic communities (the majority of the Marneuli and Gardabani population are ethnic Azerbaijanis);
- The region is a vulnerable zone in terms of illicit economic activities (the seaport town of Poti).

The study pursued two main objectives:

1. *Comparing the situation in the media in these regions with the situation that has taken shape in the project's target regions.* This approach enabled the research group to compare the development level of media organizations in the aforementioned regions on the one hand, and on the other, it created an extra possibility for the research group to measure the outcome of the activities that were carried out under the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting's* project.
2. *Providing recommendations to donor organizations.* The analysis of the information collected during the study provides an accurate description of the situation in the media sector in Kvemo Kartli and Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti. It demonstrates strengths and weakness of the local media, and also highlights those organizational and professional aspects on whose development the donor organizations' future efforts can concentrate.

The study was conducted with consideration of the following criteria:

¹⁰ The study in Kvemo Kartli region was conducted on 11-13 March 2005, 2 May 2006 and 27-28 March 2007. In Samegrelo region, it was conducted on 24-29 April 2005 and 21-24 March 2007.

- Organizational stability of print media organizations;
- Economic viability of print media organizations;
- Strategy and forms of distribution of newspapers;
- Forms and skills of finding advertisers;
- Management patterns in the newspaper (forms of functioning of the editorial and organizations structures);
- Ethical standards and values of journalists;
- Extent of balance in reporting and analysis;
- Ways of receiving information.

6.1 The state of the free media and their role in the region's public life

6.1.1 Media development overview

Marneuli

From the standpoint of development of the free media, the situation in the Kvemo Kartli region is quite grave. There is only one independent print media organization in the region, the *Taimeri* newspaper, which is a newly founded regional newspaper (founded in August 2006). It is therefore premature to discuss its role in the region's social and political development, although the periodical, which was founded under the auspices of the *Civil Development Agency* nongovernmental organization, stands a chance to develop into a strong regional newspaper which will be independent of the authorities. The paper has own correspondents in every district of the region. The paper is working to create its own distribution network too. Its journalists regularly attend training courses to improve their professional skills. The paper is funded by the *Catholic Relief Services-Georgia*.

There is only one print media organization with more or less regular issues in Marneuli, the *Akhali Marneuli* newspaper, which is a legal successor to the paper that existed in the Soviet period. Although the paper was registered as a limited liability company when Georgia won independence, it is mainly funded by the local self-government. The paper's economic dependence on the local government's budget limits its independence. The paper's editorial policy is also under the local authorities' control. Neither can the

regularity of issues be guaranteed – instability of financing from the local self-government budget often delays issues for months. There is no unit at the editorial office which would have clearly assigned managerial functions; nor are there advertising agents. Accordingly, the paper runs few commercial ads, which otherwise might earn revenues as an alternative or extra source of income in addition to the local government's allocations.

The problem of regularity of issues as well as the malfunctioning distribution network decrease the paper's recognizability and its public influence. The paper's journalists have limited possibilities to attend training courses organized by different international organizations. This hinders the journalists' professional growth and has a negative effect on the paper's content. The paper mainly publishes the local administration's decisions and interviews with the district's high-level officials. The paper has remarkably few rubrics. It pays less attention to reporting on social and economic problems in the district, does not cover environmental problems, and has no tradition of journalistic investigations.

Despite the fact that the paper is bilingual, Georgian and Azerbaijani, its editorial office does not focus on ethnic minority problems. According to local analysts, the paper does not report on district-specific problems, such as the issue of integration of local minorities into society, their participation in local self-governance, or the problem of language and other specific problems. It is clear from the above that the local paper cannot properly inform the public.

The electronic media in Marneuli are represented by Marneuli TV and the Marneuli community radio. Some positive changes are under way at the TV company since the new director joined it. Because of the shortage of journalistic staff, the TV company management has to invite new staff, who have to acquire professional skills as they work. The journalists attend training courses organized by international organizations. The TV company closely cooperates with different donor organizations, although it has not yet carried out any particular project with donor organizations' support. From 2006, the TV company started to produce news bulletins on the developments in the district twice a week. The 20-minute bulletin is broadcast in both Georgian and Azerbaijani lan-

guages. The rest of the viewing grid is taken up by entertainment. Local analysts say that the recent changes at the TV company have a positive influence on the company's development. However, re-training and development of the journalistic staff is necessary for their professional growth and development.

The channel at present does not produce interactive projects, which would facilitate the audience's involvement in the media sector and popularize the TV company. The management team's efforts to boost the channel's approval ratings in the audience concentrate mainly on reporting on the viewers' problems in the news bulletins. The channel's representatives said that often the municipality takes note of different social, economic and ecological problems that were reported and tries its best to resolve them. On the other hand, funding from the local government's budget reduces the level of the TV company's independence.

Despite the aforementioned activities, irregularity of the channel's news bulletins and the lack of journalistic experience in news reporting hinders the TV company's evolution into a strong and influential district-level media organization.

The newly founded community radio is largely staffed with amateur journalists and individuals with the NGO background. Different international organizations are involved in supporting the radio's personnel in their professional development. Despite the fact that the radio has no licence and is not yet on the air, its programming grid already exists. The journalists are working daily on obtaining and processing the information. However, because the radio does not broadcast yet, it is premature to talk about its influence on the media sector of the district. To address the licence-related problems, the radio purchased loudspeakers with a view to broadcasting in the most crowded area of the town.

Gardabani

In Gardabani district, the development level of the media organizations is even lower than in Marneuli. There are no electronic media at all there. The district has only one print media organization, the *Akbali Gardabani* newspaper. The paper is fully funded from the district budget and has no other sources of

income apart from the municipal budget. It has no subscribers, and almost all of its circulation is distributed free of charge. The paper has no management department which would work on the creation of a distribution network and on finding advertisers. The lack of journalists in the district directly affects the paper's content, which is for the most part limited to printing municipality decisions.

Using the present study's criteria, the media situation in Kvemo Kartli can be described as follows:

- Organizational weakness of the print media:
 - No separation of managerial and editorial policies;
 - Lack of managerial skills;
- Absence of distribution networks and failure to use alternative methods of distribution (for print media);
- Limited advertisement market on the one hand, and on the other, lack of experience and skills in finding advertisers (both print and electronic media);
- Irregularity of issues (print media);
- Control over the editorial policy by the local municipalities (print media);
- Absence of a broadcasting licence (in the case of the Community radio) and lack of equipment (TV company);
- No access to modern means of communication and the Internet (both print and electronic media, with the exception of the Marneuli Community Radio).

6.1.2 Channels of informing the public

According to the findings of the study, the media of informing the public in the Kvemo Kartli region can be divided into two main groups:

a) In terms of speed and reliability of information delivery, the ethnic Georgian population gives priority to the following central TV channels and newspapers:

1. The *Imedi* TV;
2. The *Rustavi 2* TV;
3. The *Kviris Palitra* newspaper.

b) The majority of the ethnic Azerbaijani population relies on Azerbaijani and Russian channels for information delivery.

Among the ethnic Azeri population, the *Svobodnaya Gruzija* (*Tavisupali Sakartvelo*) newspaper is considered the most trustworthy. The study shows that the choice of information channels depends on the command of the language. Participants in focus group discussions often noted that they are unable to receive information on the developments in Georgia because they cannot speak the Georgian language. They learn about the developments in Georgia from the Azerbaijani TV channels. Respondents gave a positive assessment to the Georgian Public Broadcaster's initiative to translate its news bulletins into Azeri, but they also noted that inaccuracies of translation often stand to cause misunderstanding. A majority of the respondents give priority to the electronic media as a source of information and cite the following as explanation:

- TV reports news as it happens;
- TV journalists are more competent;
- Information is more accessible and does not involve extra expenses.

Neither the Georgian-speaking nor the Azeri-speaking population read the papers regularly. Respondents noted that the habit of reading the newspapers disappeared after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In addition, many people cannot afford to buy a newspaper. Apart from it, there are numerous problems which prevent them from taking interest in the newspapers, such as:

- *Inefficient distribution network*. Respondents noted that the subscription system is defunct. There is only one kiosk in the town, where a newspaper can be bought. And there is almost no mechanism of supplying newspapers to rural residents of the district;
- *Slow information delivery*. In some respondents' opinion, print media reports on the same information and problems which they already are aware of due to the electronic media.

The local population learns about the developments in the region mostly from the *Marneuli TV* channel. However, it airs news bulletins only twice a week and for the most part, it reports on the sessions of the local legislature.

“We get the information from the local TV station. They have a news bulletin once a week, which provides coverage of legislature sessions. The session discusses the district’s problems. The bulletin is on the air from 0800 to 0830 just one day a week. This is how we learn what problems were discussed and what was decided. The good thing about it is that, for example, the bulletin is broadcast in both Georgian and Russian, so the ethnic Azerbaijanis who do not speak even Russian can follow the programme.”

The local paper is unable to perform its main function of informing the public. Respondents who participated in the discussion said that the paper is absolutely uninformative. The irregularity of editions and an inefficient distribution network decrease the paper’s recognizability for the public. The paper’s content is limited to printing the local administration’s decisions and a small number of classifieds.

Against the backdrop of the aforementioned problems, it is obvious that the *Akbali Marneuli* newspaper’s recognizability among the public is very low. Civil servants and teachers know about the newspaper because it is the public sector institutions that subscribe to the paper.

“The paper (*Akbali Marneuli*) is still published and it is delivered to the university. The paper is mainly handed out at schools, offices and the local legislature. The rest of the population cannot get it. Simply, the offices subscribe to it, so that it has revenues. This is how the paper continues to exist. The paper prints stale news, and it is different from what the newspapers used to be.”

Incidentally, many of the respondents who participated in the focus group discussion did not have any information about the paper at all.

Some of the interviewed say they learn about the developments in the district from their acquaintances. There are close ties among the residents, and the grapevine and rumours from the municipality’s corridors are adequate to public demands and render the people indifferent to the weak local media sources.

“Marneuli is a small town, it is like a family, so there is no need to buy a paper. People learn what is going on in the district anyway.”

Ethnic Azeri respondents receive religious and cultural information from the *Ehlibeyt* magazine. The magazine mainly prints educational and theological articles about Islam. The magazine also prints historical articles and reports on different religious celebrations. It is distributed free and accordingly, is affordable to the respondents.

Respondents noted that the economic weakness and poor content of the local media force local young journalists to try to realize their potential in central media sources. Journalists tend to migrate to Tbilisi and Baku. Lack of motivation to work in local media sources is cited as the main reason for the migration of journalists.

6.1.2 Free media and public expectations

Public interest in the local media is triggered by local social and economic conditions and ethnic diversity. Despite the fact that there is effectively no independent media organization in the region,¹¹ the public believes that an independent newspaper must exist. In their opinion, the paper should report on the following subjects:

- Local self-government, its relations with the regional authorities, problems of their functioning and transparency;
- Economic issues, problems related to land privatization;
- Opportunities created by development of the small business sector and agriculture;
- Social problems and efforts to resolve them; flaws in and lack of transparency of the current approach;
- Information on frequent legislative changes in the country;
- Research and reporting on unemployment;
- Reporting on criminal events and the role of law enforcement agencies in combating crime.

Respondents expect impartial and critical reporting from journalists who cover the above issues. In their opinion, journalists should free themselves from the influence of the region's political and business groups and supply unbiased information to the public. Only

¹¹ At the time when the study was conducted, the independent newspaper *Taimeri* did not exist. Accordingly, the public attitude toward that paper is not included in the report.

if this approach is adopted will the public deem the media organizations' role in the social and political life as positive.

Respondents also noted that there have to be rubrics for youth in the newspaper. The majority of young respondents who participated in focus group discussions want to find in the newspaper the information on sports and cultural events in the district. Respondents who work at educational institutions and those with young children said that the paper should be interesting for the children too; it would be good if the paper had children's and educational rubrics.

Respondents who participated in focus group discussions consider the language barrier as a separate problem in the region. In their opinion, the local newspaper should be at least bilingual (Georgian and Azeri). Some respondents think that it would be better if the paper was printed in Russian too because there is also ethnic Armenian and Greek population in the region. In addition, part of the ethnic Azeri population was educated in Russian and cannot read Azeri-language papers.

The majority of respondents highlighted the following technical and visual problems of the newspapers:

- The paper's visual side should be acceptable for the customer (the *Akhali Marneuli* is printed on poor-quality paper, which does not make the reader want to buy it);
- A distribution network and a subscription system must exist;
- The local paper should be cheaper than the central papers and more affordable for the public;
- Spelling and stylistic mistakes should be eliminated.

Respondents' requirements are quite diverse and include issues like content, the choice of subjects, and technical recommendations. Public expectations and the product supplied by the regional media sources differ dramatically. The current situation makes the regional media products uncompetitive compared to the central media's. Because of the unsatisfactory content and poor technical quality of the local newspapers, the population favours the central and Azerbaijani media organizations, while the local media sector remains underdeveloped.

“No one buys *Akhali Marneuli* because they do not report on interesting issues. When *Svobodnaya Gruzija* reports on some in-

teresting and pressing issue, we buy it. And *Akbali Marneuli* only prints invitations for tenders announced by the local administration. There is no criticism, only congratulations and obituaries. A significant portion of the population does not know about *Akbali Marneuli* at all.”

6.1.3 Media and the authorities

In the Kvemo Kartli region, in particular in Marneuli and Gardabani districts, relations between media organizations and the authorities are mainly cooperative and of a mutually dependent nature. Local self-governments are main financial sponsors of the majority of media organizations. This, naturally, prevents the media from performing one of its main functions, monitoring of the authorities’ activities and ensuring their transparency. Despite financial and infrastructural dependence on the authorities,¹² some media organizations are still trying to report on the district’s problems and monitor the local authorities’ reaction to the reports. Journalists from the Marneuli TV channel said that officials often discuss the problems they reported on at the local legislature’s sessions and try to resolve them. Mostly, successful cooperation of this kind between the media organizations and the authorities takes place after reports on issues such as the town’s infrastructure or waste management. At this stage, the media do not report on issues such as the implementation of state language programmes developed for the local public, civil integration of ethnic minorities, monitoring of the law enforcement agencies and so on, which might constitute an offer to the local authorities to start working on these problems.

Relations between the local authorities and media organizations in Marneuli and Gardabani districts are different. In the Marneuli district, the development of the nongovernmental sector and the journalists’ familiarity with the forms of finding public information and maintaining relations with public officials made the local self-government more open to media organizations. In Gardabani dis-

¹² The *Akbali Marneuli* and *Akbali Gardabani* newspapers are funded by the local self-governments. The *MarneuliTV* channel also receives most of its funding from the local self-government.

trict, the situation is different. Despite the fact that the local newspaper is financed by the local government, journalists say that they find it hard both to gain access to public information and to get the authorities' consent to interviewing officials. This can be explained both by the lack of professional skills among the journalists and by the local authorities' wish to avoid journalists. Otherwise it can be ascribed to the local authorities not having any interest toward the local media at all.

6.2 The state of the free media in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti and their role in the region's public life

6.2.1 Media development overview

The situation for media organizations varies from town to town in the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region. In this section, we will discuss the situation in each town (Zugdidi, Senaki, Poti) separately.

Zugdidi

In the town of Zugdidi, the situation in the electronic and print media sectors should be discussed separately. The need for specialized discussion is predicated on qualitatively different development levels of these two branches of the media sector and the extent of their social influence. The electronic media are quite well-developed in the district, while the local print media lag much behind.

Different projects implemented by international organizations over the years in the district bordering on the conflict zone have facilitated the development of quite a strong nongovernmental sector at the local level. In addition, various projects have been implemented to help develop the electronic media in the region. Nongovernmental organizations needed a conduit to inform the public of their values, and the local media were in a position to act as a mediator in this. As a result, the *Atinati* radio was founded under the auspices of the *Atinati* nongovernmental organization, which should be considered the most influential media organization in the region. The station has been implementing various projects to report on pressing social problems. The functions of editorial and managerial depart-

ments are clearly demarcated at the station, and marketing studies are conducted to accurately identify target groups and public demand. On the basis of study results, different programmes are produced for different social and age groups. The station also produces interactive projects, in which listeners become direct participants in the programme. The station was founded under the auspices of a nongovernmental organization; one of its main functions is promoting civic values in society, familiarizing citizens with their rights and, when those rights are violated, finding and discussing the ways in which they can be protected. For this purpose, the station produces many consultative and educational programmes. The station focuses on the aspects of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, as well as social and economic problems of internally displaced persons. *Atinati* is involved in joint projects with central and other regional media sources. Relations between the station and the local authorities are best described as cautious but cooperative. Cooperation on some issue does not rule out the possibility of a scathing (but always balanced and impartial) report by the station's journalist on local officials' actions. The station's financial independence from the regional administration helps it foster this approach.

The journalistic staff of the station is quite highly qualified. The journalists are motivated to develop their skills by taking part in different training courses. Some of the journalists cooperate with the central electronic and print media, which keeps their motivation growing. The station is trying to enter the advertising market; numerous advertisers were found, but the journalists' income still does not grow, which can be considered one of the hindering factors for the development of the station.

In the town of Zugdidi, the *Odishi* TV company and *Odishi* radio are representative of other electronic media. The *Odishi* TV is mostly specializing in producing news bulletins. The news bulletin is produced daily. The channel has carried out projects that were sponsored by different donor organizations, which mainly envisaged organizing debates during election campaigns and presenting different political parties to the public. The channel's financial vulnerability causes its loyalist attitude toward the local self-government and regional administration. However, this does not mean that the channel

does not report on important regional issues, be it illegal wood-felling, hazelnut business-related problems, or crime and law enforcement. The channel's journalists attended training courses on development of journalistic skills. The channel has problems both with producing reports and with selecting or determining which pressing issues should go on the air. The problem of high staff turnover, which is caused by low financial motivation to work on TV, is also painful in the company. Despite the aforementioned problems, the channel is one of the influential media organizations in the region. The *Odishi Plus* radio is mainly a music/entertainment station, although it does produce a brief news bulletin too.

The electronic media in Zugdidi has the following characteristics:

- Separated organizational and editorial policies (both in the radio and on TV);
- Formulated managerial and advertising policies (the *Atinati* radio);
- Programming diversity (the *Atinati* radio):
 - Programmes that are mainly oriented toward region-specific problems;
 - Programmes on civil rights;
 - Occasional joint projects with the central and other regional media;
 - Entertainment and educational programmes;
- Balanced reporting; cooperation with the local authorities while trying to keep a distance from them (both in the station's and channel's case);
- Economic independence from both the local authorities and business groups (the *Atinati* radio);
- High professional level of journalists and their involvement in different projects (this is especially true about *Atinati's* journalists);
- Low salaries, which have a negative effect on the journalists' professional motivation.

While the electronic media in Zugdidi are quite well-developed from the editorial, managerial, and professional points of view, the local print media cannot claim the same. At this stage, only a few newspapers are published in Zugdidi: *Kolkburi Versia*, *Ghia Boklomi*, *Zugdidi*, and the *Zugdidelebi* magazine, which is associated with the

latter. Their editorial policies are different. The *Zugdidi* newspaper depends entirely on the local municipality for financing. The paper mainly publishes the decisions by the local administration. The paper does not cover local or regional problems and is loyal to the authorities. Its editor said that despite numerous attempts, the paper has failed to gain financial independence. The *Zugdidelebi* magazine, which is published by the same editorial office, is a tabloid. It prints interviews with local celebrities and has different entertaining rubrics. The *Ghia Boklomi* newspaper was founded by journalism students, although older journalists with some experience also cooperate with the paper. The paper is scandal-oriented and prints unbalanced articles about the local authorities. For now, only a few issues of the paper have been published. The paper's staff has no development plan for the paper, and there is no management group which would work on finding advertisers or on the paper's structural development. The journalists have not attended any training courses which would facilitate their professional development. The situation in the paper prevents it from being published regularly and becoming a stable socio-political print medium. Both the paper's financial weakness and its journalists' professional level make the paper vulnerable. It is possible that it will become a tool of manipulation for some political or business group. *Kolkhuri Versia* is relatively more balanced compared to other newspapers in the district. However, because of the poor professional development level of its journalistic staff and other problems, the paper is unable to provide proper coverage of regional problems.

Despite their different styles, the papers that are published in Zugdidi are not much different from one another in terms of their development level or public influence. With respect to the editorial policy and management, the situation in the papers can be described as follows:

The journalists' professional level is poor. Journalists have difficulties in identifying and reporting stories due to lack of appropriate skills. There is no differentiation by topic for individual journalists to work on specific issues and report on them with professionalism. In the print media, there are no economic, social, political and other rubrics in which the current situation would be analyzed and alternative information would be supplied to the public. The policy of

cooperation with other segments of society, such as nongovernmental organizations, electronic media, and other social groups, is not clearly formulated. There are no signs of attempts to work with donor organizations.

Editorial and managerial policies in the district's papers are not separated. In most cases, the papers' editors combine both functions. Weak management, lack of human and other resources, which are required for its development, and absence of an appropriate development policy, together with other problems, result in a disorganized distribution network. The absence of advertising agents is also a huge problem for the local print media.

All this explains why their recognizability among the local public is so low. Regional correspondents of the central print media do not cooperate with the local papers. The problem is that neither the editors of the local papers demonstrate any initiative to invite them to their newspapers, nor are those correspondents willing to cooperate without financial incentives.

The print media in the district have the following common characteristics:

- Weak financial position
- Lack of issue regularity
- Difficulty in finding advertisers
- Poor functioning of the distribution network
- Lack of professional journalistic resources
- Inadequate coverage of regional problems
- Financial dependence on the local municipality (in the *Zugdidelebi* newspaper's case)

Senaki

There are few media sources in Senaki district. Only one electronic medium, the *Egrisi* TV, is functioning in the district, and only two newspapers, *Kolkheti* and *Mrtsamsi*, are printed there. The social and economic problems of the district, migration from the district to the capital city and poorly developed infrastructure and small business sector all affect the development level of the local media sources. The development level of the local media sector can be described as downright low.

The TV channel's viewing grid is largely filled up with news bulletins and commercial announcements. Programming of the nationwide channels is rebroadcast all the rest of the air time. The TV channel is under-equipped, which affects its products. The channel is unable to carry out the projects which would help boost its ratings among the audience.

The *Kolkheti* newspaper, although it has the status of an independent organization, is mainly funded by the local self-government and its existence is almost entirely dependent on the authorities' good will. The paper's issues are not regular; often they cannot be printed for months. The paper mostly prints the decisions by the local government and interviews with the district's famous people. It is unable to provide coverage of social and economic problems in the district and in the region. The editorial office has no management group which would seek advertisers and build the paper's distribution network. Just two or three staffers are dealing with the paper's content-related or technical problems; naturally, this has a negative impact on the paper's quality. The *Mrtsamsi* newspaper is a periodical of a nongovernmental organization, although at present, it is temporarily out of print due to financial problems.

The media organizations have no clearly formulated goals or vision for their organizational development. No new projects are initiated, especially in the print media. There is no system of attracting new staffers; papers keep working by inertia. The weakness of the nongovernmental organizations and absence of the links between these two social sectors account for lack of attention to the local authorities' functioning. The media are unable to monitor the local authorities' activities.

The media sector in Senaki district can be described as having the following characteristics:

- Small circulation and inefficient distribution network of the print media
- Lack of equipment and technologies (both electronic and print media)
- Financial dependence on local municipalities (print media)
- Lack of advertising and poor functioning of advertising policy

- Lack of separation of editorial and managerial functions
- Low level of journalistic professionalism

Poti

The media sector in the town of Poti is quite different from both other towns in the region and from other administrative units in Georgia. About a dozen of new periodicals and two TV companies have been founded in Poti in the recent years (one of the channels, *Media-Val*, existed for only a few months). The majority of the papers became defunct after releasing one or two issues, but legally, they would not close down. Despite the diversification of the media sector, competition between the media sources in the town cannot be felt. The dynamic of frequent founding and closing down the papers in town has several reasons. According to local experts, one of the methods of lobbying interests of big businesses in the town and embarking on a political career is founding a media source and using it to protect one's own interests. The papers are discontinued when the paper's and/or its founders' financial goals are achieved. Another reason for frequent founding the papers could be the local journalists' ambition to have their own newspaper. When this is the case, the journalists have no clear idea at the moment of founding the paper as to what types of resources (both material and professional) are required to found a periodical.

Despite the fact that at any given time, two or three newspapers are always printed in the town, there is no sense of competition among the papers for the audience or for the opportunities to supply exclusive information or news. The majority of the local papers mainly exist for one of the two interdependent reasons: a) promoting their sponsor's interests or b) criticizing groups with interests conflicting with those of the founders. This is why there is no competition there, but rather conflicts between representatives of different interest groups. With the loss of the sponsor, the majority of the papers are either closed down or they start looking for a new "donor". This situation results in a biased local media sector and does not help the journalists' professional development. When the main incentive to found a newspaper is lobbying the interests of

some group and getting some material benefits, efforts to obtain information, provide impartial coverage, achieve the professional development of journalists, create a distribution network, and seek advertisers – all become second-tier priorities. It also has to be noted that the media sources that are founded for this purpose are mostly founded during election campaigns.

The majority of the media sources are not poised to monitor the local authorities. The modest capacities of both the nongovernmental sector and media organizations limit the possibility of cooperation between these two sectors.

At present, two electronic media sources are functioning in Poti, the *Metskbre Talgha* TV channel and the *Harmonia* radio; both have the same founder. Before the revolution, the channel was an important medium for the opposition parties and different groups; critical reports were produced on the mayor's office and the local legislature, for example, on illegal expenditure of the budget money. After the revolution, however, the editorial policy of both the channel and the radio station changed: the company became relatively loyal to the new authorities (it has to be taken into account that the director of the TV company took a government job). The TV company has a background of carrying out several projects sponsored by donor organizations, mainly on the debates during election campaigns. Journalists underwent training to improve their professional skills. Both the TV and radio stations are equipped quite well. A group of advertising agents is in charge of finding advertisers. The TV company produces a daily news bulletin which reports on significant developments in the town and the region.

At present,¹³ the *Tavisupali Sitqva*, *Reziume*, and *Nikoladzis Gzhit* newspapers are the functioning media sources in the town. The *Reziume* and *Nikoladzis Gzhit* are mainly funded by the local municipality and distributed by subscriptions to the government departments. From 2007, the Information Department of the Mayor's Office started to publish information booklets to save money, in which the decisions by the local legislature are printed. As a result, the aforementioned papers found themselves deprived of the main source of

¹³ March 2007

funding. This might hinder or altogether halt the functioning of the papers. The content of both of these papers is socio-political, albeit loyalist to the local authorities; the reader does not come across materials on the important problems of the city in them.

The *Tavisupali Sitqva* newspaper is published by the *Centre for Protection of Human Rights and Social Justice* nongovernmental organization. Despite the fact that the paper is published since 2003, it could not be published regularly due to its financial instability. With financial support from the *Eurasia Foundation*, the paper started to implement a project which aimed to establish anti-corruption values in society and monitor the town's budget. During the project, the paper's issues were regular, but with the end of the project, the paper found itself facing financial problems again. The paper's relations with the local authorities are quite strained; one of the reasons for this is the paper's rampantly critical tone, and another reason is lack of balanced reporting. The paper's journalists attended different training courses which helped them improve their professional level. The paper has only three journalists (including the editor); accordingly, it is unable to cover different topics with competence. The paper's editorial office cooperates with different nongovernmental organizations, conducts journalistic investigations. The *Transparency International-Georgia* awarded a prize to the paper for one of its investigations. The paper is not equipped well, which hinders the functioning of the office. A disorganized distribution network, a small number of subscribers, and the lack of advertising skills leave little hope that the paper will develop and its issues will be regular.

For years, the *Potis Moambe* newspaper was one of the most influential and professional papers in Poti. The paper was funded by one of its founders, which made regularity of issues possible. The paper employed quite experienced journalists. The paper had many rubrics which covered different types of the town's problems. Recently, the issues were discontinued. This had two reasons: a) the founder's and paper's main financial source was no longer sufficient to support the paper; b) the government departments were put under pressure and instructed not to subscribe because of critical articles in the paper. For these reasons, the paper was temporarily suspended.

The situation of the media in Poti has the following common characteristics:

- Frequent opening of different media organizations and their short life span (for the print media);
- Frequent use of print periodicals for promotion of political and business interests;
- Problem of balanced reporting in print periodicals with regular issues;
- Shortage of professional and unbiased journalistic staff;
- Dependence of the editorial policy on the founder's interests (both in the print and electronic media);
- Lack of separation of editorial and managerial functions;
- Problems with finding advertisers (print media);
- Mismanaged distribution networks for the print media.

6.2.2 Channels of informing the public

The majority of participants of focus group discussions both in Zugdidi and in Poti gave their preference to the central channels (*Imedi TV, Rustavi-2*) in terms of efficient delivery and reliability of information. From among the print media too, the majority of the respondents mainly read central papers (*Kviris Palitra, Alia, Asaval-Dasavali*). Respondents noted that they often receive information on the developments in the region from the central media. In their opinion, reports from those sources are more comprehensive and competent.

The public attitude toward the local media sources is fickle. The frequently changing public attitude toward the media sources is a result of the media owners' positions on social issues and their changes. Some of the respondents gave a positive assessment to the *Metskbre Talgha* TV company; they like the critical reports the channel produces and interesting materials of journalistic investigations. When the director of the channel took the post of deputy governor, some of the respondents lost trust in the company. In their opinion, the TV company became less critical and its level of freedom decreased.

“The TV company worked well, it produced a report on embezzled budget money. It had a free leash, but ever since its

director became deputy governor, the channel is not so critical any more, and it no longer reports on all the issues.”

The *Odishi* TV company in the town of Zugdidi commands trust of the local public. The majority of respondents note that the TV company reports on the district’s developments. The town’s social and political life is uneventful, and accordingly, the reports that the channel produces lack versatility. Some respondents add that they cannot sense the channel’s affiliation with any of the political groups; yet the paper does not seem to criticize the local authorities.

The *Atinati* radio is the most trustworthy media source according to focus group participants. The series of socio-political and cultural programmes which the radio station has been producing increases the station’s influence on the local public. Respondents noted that the radio’s interactive programmes enabled the public to express their opinion on different developments in the country by phoning in.

“The only media source where I can go or phone at any time and supply information to the public is the *Atinati* radio.”

Respondents give a positive assessment to *Atinati*’s cultural and educational programmes too and note that the radio has listeners from different age groups and social strata. Programmes that provide legal advice and other programmes of consultative nature, which the radio produces in cooperation with local nongovernmental organizations, are especially popular.

The majority of focus group participants in the town of Zugdidi give a negative assessment to the local print media organizations. In their opinion, the local print media exist only notionally. The public does not read the local paper. There are several reasons for this: irregular intervals between the issues, poor performance of the distribution network, and lack of professionalism among the journalists.

“Besides, it is not that we have journalists whose writing is an absorbing read. I think that journalism is more of a talent than a craft, otherwise I too can attend some courses and claim that I am a journalist, but who would read my writing?”

Respondents also note that there are no analytical articles in the local papers, and there is no deep and impartial discussion of the developments. The papers are unable to supply news to the public in a timely fashion due to irregular intervals between the issues.

“What should I read in the local papers? We already know what they write about anyway.”

“Nothing happens in Zugdidi that a paper should write about. If something happens, we learn about it from the television anyway.”

Respondents also noted that the local papers mainly print interviews with local officials, but the public knows them well enough and do not need any additional information about them. Residents of Zugdidi learn about the news from personal contacts as well, and they cannot recall an example of getting information from the local paper which they have not known before.

The attitude toward the local print media in the town of Poti is different. If in the town of Zugdidi, the population does not attach any significance to the local papers' role in the social and political life, the public in Poti gives different assessments to the role of the print media. Attitudes toward different periodicals vary too. The main common criterion in the respondents' assessments of the newspapers is their affiliation with some political group. The respondents noted that every newspaper was a mouthpiece for some political or local interest group.

“If we take an in-depth look, we will see that the articles mainly spew spite and depend on the journalist's personal attitudes. You can guess who is behind the newspaper.”

Respondents noted that the papers become particularly active before the elections. It also has to be noted that the papers which were founded right before the elections close down soon after.

Participants in focus group discussions divide the local newspapers into “opposition”, “pro-government”, and “impartial” categories. The criterion for such categorization of the local newspapers by the respondents is the political position of the founder or informal financial sponsor of the newspaper.

According to respondents, large numbers of newspapers have a negative effect on the quality of articles and the professionalism of journalists. Journalism has become a “readily available” occupation. In their opinion, the majority of local journalists have no skills and education required for analysis and impartial coverage of developments.

The majority of respondents give a positive assessment to *Potis Moambe*. The paper is critical of both the local authorities and the opposition. It accurately depicts different public attitudes. At the same time, the level of professionalism of the paper's journalists is acceptable for the local public.

"*Potis Moambe* stands out from among the local papers for its criticism of the local authorities."

"*Potis Moambe* is different from other papers for its good Georgian language as well as for its articles."

Both Poti and Zugdidi newspapers have problems with professionalism and management.

Participants in focus group discussions in both towns noted that journalists' professional level is quite low and materials printed in the local papers cannot compete with those in the central press.

"News spread very fast in Zugdidi by word of mouth, and this is considered more reliable than what some journalist might see and report," a participant in a focus group discussion in Zugdidi said.

"Every area has its specialists, but this does not hold true here; the same person combines the jobs of a journalist, a teacher, a doctor. Of course, this has a negative effect on the articles," a focus group participant in Poti said.

Respondents also noted that the papers' circulation is small and therefore they cannot inform the public. The paper is read by people who are actively involved in social and political life; the articles which are printed in the paper are precisely about those people. The papers both in Zugdidi and Poti cannot manage to reach the wide strata of society.

6.2.3 Free media and public expectations

Public expectations for the local media organizations stem from the district's problems. In the opinion of focus group participants in Zugdidi, the local media should be reporting extensively on Georgian-Abkhaz conflict-related issues. Focus group participants in the town of Poti expect that the media should monitor the town budget and report extensively on problems of the seaport. In their opinion, the local media should not be reporting on a problem just once; the

problem should remain in the media's focus until it is resolved. Respondents from Poti noted that one of their main expectations was the media's independence from the interests of different political interest groups. Some respondents noted that the local media pay little attention to the environmental issues, which are quite pressing both in the town of Poti and in the town of Zugdidi.

Respondents also noted that the media organizations in the region have not become business groups yet, which makes them vulnerable. In their opinion, it would be desirable if the media organizations paid more attention to the advertising policy and marketing, which should make their financial stability possible.

In addition to the aforementioned issues, the study established the following public demands and expectations for the local media sources:

- Local print media sources should become more critical of the local authorities (Zugdidi);
- Media organizations should be impartial, so it is undesirable for them to adopt "pro-government" or "opposition" sentiments; the media reporting should be balanced (Poti);
- Materials produced by the media organizations should cover a variety of topics and should be of interest for different strata of society (respondents noted that the reports, however diverse, should be focused on the region);
- Papers should report on youth problems, interests, and achievements;
- It would be desirable if journalistic investigation was introduced in the local media organizations. This should be aimed at the monitoring of large-scale projects and assessment of their transparency (Poti);
- There is a need for professional growth and development of journalists, so that their product is more professional and reliable.

Respondents also noted that the local media sources mostly report on political developments while paying less attention to other aspects of social life. In their opinion, it would be good if separate rubrics were produced on the town's cultural life or prominent people. It would also be desirable if the papers wrote about young people's achievements in sports or culture in the country.

Respondents also noted that development of the media greatly depends on the region's economic development. In their opinion, precisely the social and economic problems are the reason for the weakness of the local media, and it is quite difficult for these two interdependent variables to develop independently from each other.

6.2.4 Media and the authorities

Relations between these two sectors are unpredictable and mutable, and depend on changes of local political elites. There are no instances of direct intimidation or assault and battery against journalists, although some forms of putting pressure on journalists do take place both in Poti and in Zugdidi.

The authorities' attitude toward the media organizations is selective. According to local experts, representatives of the media organizations with the pro-government slant can receive information which should be publicly available without hindrance, interview high-level officials, and so on. Relations with the media organizations which are considered "opposition" are more strained. Sometimes the local authorities sever all relations with the periodical which they find unacceptable.

The fact that the authorities' attitudes toward the central and local media are different is a separate problem. Local journalists often noted that the administration mainly invites to different events and news conferences the correspondents of the central press, and often the information remains unknown to the local media organizations, especially the print media.

It also has to be noted that the efforts of nongovernmental organizations and journalists yielded some results in the town of Poti. In particular, journalists can see on the bulletin board in the mayor's office when a meeting of the local legislature is scheduled.

One of the main problems of the local print media is its financial weakness. At this stage, they cannot manage to get a handle on the advertising market and take a grip of financial levers. Their subscribers are often government organizations, which is quite a strong lever in the hands of the local authorities. If a media organization decides to criticize and discuss the authorities' policy, the authorities may use informal mechanisms to discourage government organizations from subscribing the paper.

7. MAIN FINDINGS OF THE COMPARATIVE STUDY

The research conducted under the project makes it possible to compare the regions under study and highlight differences and similarities between them from the point of view of media development.

Regional print media organizations in Georgia are confronted with similar problems. The problems can be divided into three main categories: a) editorial policy; b) equipment; c) organizational management. It is also a fact that without support from donor organizations, it is quite difficult to create strong regional media organizations at present.

This subchapter attempts to compare print media sources by the aforementioned three criteria. Those media organizations which took part in the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting's* project will be compared to the media organizations from the two regions, Kvemo Kartli and Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, which may get in the focus of support of donor organizations in the future.

Editorial policy

The paper's structure

- In the print media organizations which took part in the project, the papers' editorial structure improved. The areas of activities were divided among the journalists
- In the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti and Kvemo Kartli regional print media organizations (with the exception of the *Taimeri* newspaper), this type of division is either incomplete or nonexistent.

Journalistic professionalism

- Journalists who took part in the project underwent training according to their areas of specialization, which envisaged broadening their knowledge in their specific areas and improving the skills of obtaining and analyzing the information
- In the target regions of the study where the project has not been conducted, the print media journalists attended different

training courses. However, owing to the absence of division of responsibilities, the journalists' professional development is less systematic.

Balanced information

- One of the similarities among the newspapers which participated in the project is more balanced reporting.
- In the majority of the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti and Kvemo Kartli regional print media organizations (with the exception of the *Taimeri* newspaper), the problem of balanced reporting is still pressing.

Equipment

- Despite the fact that the material infrastructure of the newspapers which participated in the project needs improvement, the papers' offices are now equipped with the necessary minimum of equipment required to produce a more or less high-quality product as a result of the project.
- The papers in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti and Kvemo Kartli own little equipment, which is one of the hindering factors which prevents normal functioning of the papers.

Organizational management

Division of functions

- As a result of the project, the editorial policy and the paper's management were separated. This paves the way for the papers' development.
- There is no such separation in the print media organizations of the aforementioned two regions.

Advertising policy

- During the project, an institution of advertising agents was created at the media organizations, which is headed by the manager. The advertising agents underwent training to learn the methods of attracting advertisers and develop professional skills.

- Such departments are not found in the print media sources in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti and Kvemo Kartli.

Design

- During the project, training courses in newspaper design were administered, in addition, each newspaper adopted an appropriate standard layout.
- It is desirable to improve and develop the papers' design in the print media sources in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti and Kvemo Kartli.

Distribution network

This problem exists in the media organizations of all the researched regions. Despite the fact that a number of activities were carried out under the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* project, which focused on the development of the skills that are required for the creation of a distribution network and formulation of a policy, creating a functioning distribution network and ensuring good sales at a high circulation still remains one of the main problems for the regional newspapers.

SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ASPECTS OF REGIONAL MEDIA DEVELOPMENT IN GEORGIA

28 February – 1 March 2007

On 28 February and 1 March 2007, the *Georgian Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development* held a round table discussion within the framework of the *Georgian Regional Media Development and Public Accountability project* with participation of analysts and representatives of the Georgian media. The discussion was divided into four sections on the following subjects:

Section 1: Media and society

1. The role of the media in the process of socialization: Coverage and dissemination of societal values
Speaker: Nino Danelia – The Georgian Institute of Public Affairs
2. Media and civil society
Speaker: David Paichadze – The Georgian Public Broadcaster
3. Media and the minorities: The role of the media in the protection of human and civil rights
Speaker: Paata Gurgenidze – The Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development

Section 2: Media and the authorities

1. Freedom of the media and public accountability: Relations with the authorities, ethical norms, and ways of practicing them in the Georgian media sector
Speaker: Paata Veshapidze – The *24 Saati* newspaper
2. The role of the media in the development of local self-governance and ensuring of its transparency
Speaker: Zviad Koridze – independent expert

3. The role of the media in the formulation of the sociopolitical agenda and shaping of public opinion: Playing the role of a moderator between the authorities and social groups
Speaker: Avto Jokhadze – The Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development

Section 3: Media and the economy

1. Media and the economy: Economic foundations and the sustainability of the media
Speaker: Niko Nergadze – The *Playboy* magazine
2. Media and the business sector: Forms of relations, consideration and coverage of interests, impact on economic development
Speaker: Paata Veshapidze – The *24 Saati* newspaper

Section 4: The role of international and donor organizations in the development of the Georgian media sector

1. Influence of donor organizations on the organizational development and economic stability of the media
Speaker: Beka Bajelidze – The Institute for War and Peace Reporting
2. Influence of donor organizations on the independence and professional development of the media
Speaker: Natia Kuprashvili – The Institute for War and Peace Reporting

Representatives of regional newspapers participating in the *Georgian Regional Media Development and Public Accountability* project took part in the round table discussion:

1. Maia Qalabegashvili (the *Spektri* newspaper, Gurjaani);
2. Ketii Arjevnishvili (the *Spektri* newspaper, Gurjaani);
3. Ia Bobokhidze (the *Akhali Gazeti* newspaper, Kutaisi);
4. Dea Managadze (the *Akhali Gazeti* newspaper, Kutaisi);
5. Lela Inasaridze (the *Samkhetis Karibche* newspaper, Akhaltsikhe);

6. Ketino Mishveladze (the *Samkhetis Karibche* newspaper, Akhaltsikhe);
7. Hayk Petrosyan (the *Samkhetis Karibche* newspaper, Akhaltsikhe);
8. Eter Turadze (the *Gazeti Batumelebi* newspaper, Batumi).

The event was organized by Malkhaz Saldadze, Giorgi Shubitidze, Merab Tsindeliani and Ketii Qavelashvili of the *Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development*. Marina Elbakidze and Lasha Chkhikvishvili of the Caucasus Institute took part in the discussion.

SECTION 1: MEDIA AND SOCIETY

The role of the media in the socialization process: Coverage and dissemination of societal values

Nino Danelia – Georgian Institute of Public Affairs

Media theorists argue that the media not only project public opinion, but also help mold it. The US Commission on the Freedom of the Press was created precisely to protect public interests. In the opinion of the commissioners, the freedom of expression is a moral right which is also associated with certain responsibilities. It is interesting to see what the situation is in the Georgian media in this respect, what values Georgian society has and what the Georgian media convey.

Values of the Georgian society

The *Open Society-Georgia Foundation* conducted a study of the values of Georgian society. The findings of the study show that survival and the meeting of the most basic material needs are higher priorities for Georgian society than a better quality of life, individual freedom and self-actualization. Although Georgian society (67.8% percent of citizens) gives preference to a democratic political system over an authoritarian one, it at the same time prefers a strong leader who is not fettered by Parliament and the elections. The study demonstrates that maintaining order in the country is more important for society than a greater involvement of citizens in the gov-

ernment decision-making. However, according to the same study, 78.5% percent of respondents say that greater emphasis should be made on the development of an individual.

Together and in conjunction with self-expression, respect for individual freedoms and tolerance are considered very important in modern democratic societies. Moreover, precisely tolerance is proclaimed by Georgian society itself as its one of the most cherished and proud traditions. However, the study draws a different picture: Georgian society puts greatest trust in the family and then in the Georgians in general, whereas people of different ethnic groups and religious denominations are less trusted. The myth of Georgian tolerance is further dispelled by their attitude toward marginal groups, such as homosexuals.

The public attitude toward the EU and NATO is another good indicator of societal values. The EU is first and foremost seen as a security guarantor and is associated with the system of democratic values and personal self-actualization to a much lesser extent.

In the opinion of participating sociologists, which is supported by the study's findings, the values of Georgian society are still of a traditional nature, although post-modernist and modernist values are also gaining foothold.

Do the Georgian media project societal values?

The Georgian media project precisely Georgian society's traditional values, rather than the value system of European societies, which is based on the principles of civil society and civic education, democracy and social covenant.

The Georgian media mainly report on information supplied during news conferences and briefings, are often biased in describing developments, and almost never do an in-depth analysis of issues. (The latest quite scandalous government meeting and the sacking of the Customs Department head is an example.)

There is almost no discussion of democratic values in general – the democratic mindset and values which lay the foundation for the country's political system, political thought and liberal principles of social development. Xenophobic trends are still quite strong in the

Georgian media: the number of players of African or Arab origin is an important issue for sportscasters during broadcasts of the French football team's games. After a report on sexual minorities, a comment is made that it is "good business that we are so far from these sorts of disgusting things". During an interactive opinion poll, a host, displeased with the critical attitude toward the law enforcers, rebuked the audience and said that law enforcers protect us while we relax and enjoy ourselves. A Georgian documentary which kindles anti-Armenian sentiments gets an award from the Patriarchate. A report on a damaged new airport terminal says that nothing else can be expected from the Turks [the terminal was built by a Turkish contractor company].

This situation should not come as a surprise if we recall a universally known thesis that the media report the reality. The media rebroadcast Georgian society's xenophobic values. They do not display initiative on their own and are unable to perform their essential function of supplying the public with full and true information on current developments, educating the public and facilitating establishment of democratic values. The media confine themselves to the narrow boundaries of entertaining and amusing the public.

Media and civil society

David Paichadze – Georgian Public Broadcasting

It is difficult to discuss relations between the Georgian media and civil society without providing a brief retrospection. It is no less difficult to choose a starting point for this retrospective analysis. It may be the year 1996, which was the year of beginning of more or less intense interaction between the Georgian media and the nongovernmental sector. In 10 years, relations have evolved through many stages, but defining and naming them might also constitute a subject for debate. In addition, it is hard to establish to which extent every one of these stages provided a reason to adopt a fresh view of relations compared to the previous stages.

Relations between the media and civil society started off as partnership: When in 1996 Pridon Injia ordered *Rustavi 2* off the

air, civil society, the then newcomer to the public arena, came to the TV channel's support. The beginning was indeed good. Of course, donor organizations operating in Georgia supported the Georgian media even before that. By 1996, first grants to Tbilisi-based and regional media organizations had already been allocated. The media too, started to gradually take notice of the phenomenon which was completely alien to the Soviet reality and therefore unusual to the contemporary society – nongovernmental organizations. The majority of the present-day approaches were born precisely at that time. Society was divided from the very outset into those who believed that civil society was a prerequisite for exercising democracy and those who deemed it a Western-founded anti-Georgian agent. Deliberating extensively on the proponents of these two views is beyond the scope of this work.

The Rose Revolution was also a new stage from the standpoint of relations between the media and civil society. It can be viewed as the most important watershed in relations between the media and civil society as well. There has been more than one meeting after the revolution, at which it was noted that civil society was weakened after its most brilliant representatives took political posts. This issue too became obsolete soon, and those people are no longer missed. The media seems to have been left without a strong ally. Two mutually contradictory opinions are often voiced: one that Georgia has great intellectual potential, and the other that there are no people who are qualified to perform some particular tasks. Those people who themselves had to start working in a different sector point at lack of qualified staff. It can be said that a process similar to the one which was under way in the nongovernmental and business sectors some 10-12 years ago is currently unfolding in the state governance system. Back then, there were areas in which people studied, worked and developed professionally at the same time. In my opinion, a maximum number of citizens were involved in nongovernmental activities, given the type of this work in Georgia – grant funding and an undeveloped culture of volunteerism.

Despite the fact that the nongovernmental sector was a dramatic novelty in the Georgian reality compared to the Soviet-time practices, the media have never been – and still are not – interested in

the nongovernmental organizations; they have been, and still are, interested in the authorities, an impersonalized phenomenon which has been kept secret from the public for decades. In the post-Communist era, the issues of power and authority immediately flooded media reports. This trend is still strong today, although it seems to be getting antiquated.

The issues of power and authority dominated the media so much that many other spheres and problems were viewed in conjunction with their political aspects. And this was not always deliberate. It was impossible to consider business activities of [Industry Will Save Georgia party leader] Gogi Topadze, [Eduard Shevardnadze's nephew] Nugzar Shevardnadze, [Eduard Shevardnadze's son-in-law] Gia Jokhtaberidze, [New Right party leader] Dato Gamqrelidze, [Shevardnadze's relative] Guram Akhvlediani and others separately from politics. As for small business, the Georgian media have never been interested in it. Many of my colleagues claimed that what by Georgian yardstick is the medium-sized business simply did not exist.

The media used the same approach to the nongovernmental sector. Its representatives were discussed first and foremost from the point of view of their political affiliation, especially if they were members of human rights organizations or think tanks. In some cases, political motives were very easy to discern in borderline-status mock nongovernmental organizations. One of the examples was the *Georgian Unity Alliance* – a group of more than 100 nongovernmental organizations affiliated with [former Kvemo Kartli Governor] Levan Mamaladze and permanently represented by the same four or five individuals. We all remember the *Zhvania-Saakashvili nongovernmental organizations*, whose activities were willingly or otherwise completely misrepresented by the media. The media's attitude toward the remaining parts of the nongovernmental sector was more or less unbiased, but uninterested. After all, reporting on them outside the context of their relations with the authorities, confrontation with the authorities, or complete allegiance with the authorities was considered irrelevant.

The same attitude not only persists, but is even reinforced at present. If you take me for my words of a journalist, many a colleague of mine often says that it is hard to come by an impartial

expert in the nongovernmental sector. One might say that the media have shared out among themselves all the people whom they call experts. You all know very well in which newspapers, and all the more so in which TV programmes, you could meet them. Their areas of operation are marked off almost as clearly as carnivores' habitats in the forest. Trespassing is rare here. Neither are experts very keen to try out the communications channels to which they are not accustomed, nor do the media make any attempts to introduce some novelty or practice some unusual approach on their pages or air. To tell the truth, the situation is on the verge of getting standpat because the media aspire to turn living people into characters in the play, they find it hard to properly analyze the developments and therefore prefer to stay in a rut. The attitudes that were inherited from the late Soviet period and preserved throughout post-Soviet times are still in play today. By this I mean the view of politics as a life-or-death battle, not a contest, among different forces. It is understandable that these views held the ground and were even reinforced by the ouster of the first president, civil war and what effectively was a *revanche*. But the Rose Revolution, which did not shed a single drop of blood of its political opponents and which replaced the old elite with the new one more or less peacefully, should have, but did not, become a driving force behind a fundamental rethinking of political processes. For the reason of mutual lack of understanding between the new politics and the old media and because of inability to comprehend modernization attempts, a noticeable section of the media sector gets hysterical when reporting on disturbances, which is in tune with hysteria among some politicians. However, it has to be noted for truth's sake that hysteria turned out to be in vain and did not yield any results – ([Internal Affairs Minister] Vano Merabishvili was not dismissed, not enough people came out onto the streets to change the government, etc), which certainly set thinking those media sources which tended to build up pressure and exaggerate the importance of reports for their audience. It is my observation that the hysterical tendency is gradually subsiding.

The media look at civil society through the political prism. Some support the authorities, and others do not. But there are organiza-

tions whose activities cannot be defined in terms of relations with the authorities: those which protect children's rights, provide shelter to homeless children, also environmental organizations, training centres, non-political research groups and highly specialized educational groups. If you look at the TV and radio stations or newspapers, you will notice that the media take little interest in them for they do not vie for power with anyone.

The nongovernmental sector is naturally seeking ties with the media, inviting journalists to meetings, presentations, training courses and seminars. However, the goals of those meetings where nongovernmental organizations want to not only inform the public, but also broaden the knowledge of the media representatives themselves are hardly ever achieved. In my memory, the most successful example of cooperation between the media and the nongovernmental sector took place in 2003, when the *Fair Elections, Georgian Young Lawyers' Association* and other nongovernmental organizations regularly conducted training courses for journalists throughout the year on the Electoral Code and detection of electoral irregularities, which yielded results too in November 2003. The journalists' interest in acquiring new knowledge again stemmed from their interest in the key political event of that year.

Inclusion of journalists in civil activities as not only targets of some project implemented by some civic group, but also as one of the actors, is a relatively new phenomenon which has not become a trend yet. In my opinion, efforts in this direction have a future and they will turn at least some sections of the media into a constituent part of civil society.

It is good that we see representatives of the regional media at this meeting. It is getting increasingly more difficult to get journalists from the Tbilisi-based media organizations interested in doing some work for a nongovernmental organization, which involves not merely collecting and disseminating information, but acquiring and passing on new knowledge. Let us not go into investigating the reasons for this here. They may range from busy work schedules to sceptical attitudes toward the capabilities of nongovernmental organizations, minor NGO influence on political decisions, and ultimately, society's lack of knowledge of the role and functions of the non-

governmental sector. This is why cooperation between the media and the part of civil society which organized itself into nongovernmental organizations is either inert or dry and pragmatic in the capital. A nongovernmental organization supplies information, and if the media deem it worthwhile, they will disseminate it. When I say that it is good to talk to journalists from the regional media, I mean that I expect to find out whether the same is true in the provinces. I myself have been doing some work in Kvemo Kartli with beginner journalists, and I saw an odd symbiosis there of the readiness and enthusiasm to get engaged in civic activities and at the same time, very little familiarity with those activities and permanent doubts whether they will make any difference. Perhaps their doubts stem from the experience of ethnic minorities' loyalty to the Georgian authorities, as these people are yet to see the return benefits of their loyalty, in other words, an effective government which would do some useful things for them. They can also see that in general, most of the activity is initiated by the authorities, so they do not know yet where to find a niche where they would be able to get involved in civil activities themselves. I read the materials printed by the regional press, and I find that the share of narratives about politics, or to be more precise, about the authorities, is smaller there than in the central media, although I cannot say that those materials stand out for their social poignancy. In general, social problems and social emphases are the Georgian journalism's Achilles' heel. The nongovernmental sector can help address this weakness, and this is feasible first and foremost in the provinces.

However, there is a category of journalists in Tbilisi with whom it really makes sense for the nongovernmental organizations to cooperate. I mean journalism students, who in the course of their studies have to deal with such a discourse, such people and such texts that you unwillingly get an impression that they are riding with the ghosts of the past. At the same time, the students feel, even know, that with this kind of education and knowledge they might irreversibly lag behind the present, which on the one hand instills in them the sense of alienation from their studies and on the other hand, kindles the interest and enthusiasm, at least in some of them, to be open to new knowledge. Precisely they are the foundation of

civil society. I have said many times and will repeat again now that I mean the Journalism Department of the [Tbilisi State] University. We look forward to greeting the nongovernmental sector, we extend to it an open invitation to the University, where it will see not the barren land and uneducated cynics, but the still interested 18-20-year-old young people. They are an undeveloped resource, a target group which the nongovernmental sector has failed to notice. The nongovernmental organizations can familiarize those people with truly pressing social issues, if, that is, they themselves can face it squarely. Precisely in working with the students I see the main objective of civil society for the near future, and I want to believe that there the sector will find the incentive to not only beget the idea of a new project and secure another grant, but also to overcome the lack of non-mercenary volunteerism in Georgian society.

Discussion:

Natia Kuprashvili: A very interesting trend is emerging in Kutaisi. Perhaps all of you know that the change of [local] government is frequent there. What is interesting is that the ex-officials cross over to the nongovernmental sector and vice versa, people from the nongovernmental sector take government jobs. People who are employed in these two sectors are permanently replacing one another. Our respondents, who were once government officials, soon become representatives of the nongovernmental sector. This has a very bad effect not only on the nongovernmental sector, but also on relations between the media and the nongovernmental sector.

Lasha Chkhikvishvili: Another point worth making here is how the media are monitoring the nongovernmental sector's activities. Why the media do not report on the nongovernmental organizations' activities, even succinctly? I used to work for the *Rustavi 2* news service, and had a problem great many times. When I wanted to produce a report and cite an expert's opinion in it, to which I of course had to get the news service director's assent, I often received a refusal. The TV company did not want or was afraid to cite the opinion or position of some nongovernmental organizations.

Eter Turadze: I just wanted to ask Dato [David Paichadze]: what exactly interests your students who are ready to acquire knowledge through cooperation with the nongovernmental organizations? What interests them more – political reporting, reporting on gender issues and so on, or, as is the case in the media in general, whatever is more interesting and pressing at the given moment? The partisan media still report on the nongovernmental sector, but focuses more on political developments than, say, on gender issues or sexual minorities.

Beka Bajelidze: It is my observation that in Georgia, the activities of the nongovernmental organizations are not reported by the media. (Batumi may even be far ahead of the capital in this respect.) The public does not see nongovernmental organizations' activities. There is a similar indifferent attitude toward the activities of commercial organizations. Take The Financial Times as an example: some 20% of page count is dedicated to social issues, the rest is business-related. Of course, this means that there is public demand for economic reporting in that society: people are interested where to invest and where and how to make money.

Marina Elbakidze: Someone has already said here that the media are not interested in civil society and in nongovernmental organizations in particular. Let us begin with what the media write about civil society in general, especially as their idea of civil society is given a very narrow interpretation and implies only nongovernmental organizations. After all, civil society is a broader concept, but if we reduce it to just nongovernmental organizations, then in a certain sense it might really not be of interest for the public who planted a tree, who organized a seminar or a training course on some issue, and so on. Although as the news, even this could be interesting.

They effectively do not report this type of information, or if they do, then very little of it. If anything is reported, it is reported by regional newspapers or local TV stations, but only because nongovernmental organizations invited them and asked them to write something. And the local media are also interested in reporting on

these issues because they do not have much to report on anyway. Revolutions happen only in Tbilisi. On the one hand, the opinion that the public is not interested in civil society is correct, but on the other hand, the problem is that the nongovernmental sector itself does not do much to make the public interested in its activities. If there is little public interest, we should generate it. If we do not work on this, the issue of civil society will not become profitable for the media business. Which issue sells better, what will the reader consume – who planted trees and how many or who said what about this or that government decision? Even the answer to this question shows how little the public and the media know about civil society. The nongovernmental sector is viewed as a group of people with certain political “tastes” or opinions; its mission – to develop society’s ability to rally around some issues on the basis of some values – remains unnoticed.

Niko Nergadze: Let us take a politically neutral issue, say, street drugs. True, there are many issues of this kind, but this one is particularly painful and pressing in our society. There are two ways to keep the public informed about it: you can conduct research and make certain that its results become public, or stage some event with the goal of drawing the media’s attention to the public once again. Despite extensive use of both methods, the media failed to make addressing this problem a priority for society. Something else is required here, perhaps, a harder work on societal values. We should not limit ourselves to just reporting on the problem.

Nino Danelia: I think civil society is not comprised of only the nongovernmental sector. It is a group with values, or citizens who uphold those values. This is why the media’s cooperation with the nongovernmental sector, or with those members of the sector who advocate civic values staunchly enough, might itself be a rich resource of the issues to report on. In addition, this would strengthen societal values too.

Eter Turadze: I want to go back to the drugs issue. I agree, the media do not work hard enough on this. I am a member of the

Batumi Penitentiary Monitoring Council, and because there are many addicts in the prison, I meet with them every day; I am interested in the media coverage of addiction. I worked with one of the nongovernmental organizations on this issue. I got the impression that they were more concerned about waging a campaign to spread general information about drugs and addiction than about a public debate on whether or not some types of drugs should be legalized, what sanctions should be introduced or what regulatory mechanisms put in place, what results will these produce, and so on. What I want to say by this is that in my view, there are problems in the nongovernmental sector as well, and often they too do not know what they should do and what their social mission is.

Of course, I would not have the effrontery to say that the media are immaculate in this respect, that is, in reporting on the activities of civil society. On the one hand, lack of civic awareness deriving from the low professional level of journalists is obvious; and on the other hand, the inertness of representatives of civil society is also striking; it is difficult for them to ensure regular communications with the media, which probably has the same reason – lack of professionalism.

Marina Elbakidze: I want to make a remark on Eteri's comment on nongovernmental organizations. With your permission, I will talk about the example you cited – not to lecture anyone, but to better demonstrate the problems in relations between the media and civil sector. It seems that the strategy is “I went, I saw, I did not like, I left.” Some nongovernmental organization takes a wrong or, to put it simply, inappropriate approach to some problem. You looked at it, took note of this as a person, and said good-bye. I simply want to generalize. Perhaps the media often act this way.

Paata Gurgenidze: This discussion shows that the voice of civil society should be heard in the media. We all seem to agree to this. What is needed is not writing about civil society organizations, but making their voice heard. We also have to make clear how exactly we should make their voice heard. There are ways of doing this

which we often use; educating journalists is one of these methods. After retraining, they made some of the ideas heard through the media. There are other methods, say, staging scandalous actions. In this case, this is not necessarily the nongovernmental sector's "know-how". All groups resort to these methods, but another method which is specifically and directly characteristic of the civil sector is supporting the independent media. Naturally, the independent media themselves are considered part of the civil society. Even political parties are regarded as civil society. I want to stress the importance of the independent media. The independent media are indeed part of civil society. I remember the phenomenon of the German newspaper *Die Tageszeitung*. The paper is independent, influential, and has quite a large readership in Germany, although both in Europe and in the United States there are few papers of this type. For the media to be independent, they should be commercially profitable, and we help them in this, but once the media source becomes a business, it is not independent any more. It departs from civil values and gets closer to what the circles that are far from civil values might demand. Then we have to start talking about how civil society should find the way to get its message across using the commercial media. This is more of a rhetorical question to me, I do not have a direct answer, although I do think that it merits discussion; there are extensive commercial interests behind the commercial media. They give rise to political interests, which under this structural influence shape the media's goals.

The media, as you said, is a means of socialization; in the next discussion on the local media, I want to bring this aspect to the fore. The media cannot be just a technology of dissemination of impartial information. It is a fact that all the media are means of socialization. It is theoretically possible for the media to be absolutely impartial. If the media should convey the civil sector's voice to help establish some values in society, this means that they cannot be completely devoid of bias because they must have their own views.

Media and the minorities: The role of the media in the protection of human and civil rights

Paata Gurgenidze – The Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development

The *Caucasus Institute* has launched a new project, *The independent media for civil integration*. Accordingly, I will deal with my subject – the media and the minorities – from the aspect of civil integration of the minorities.

I will touch in this report on the situation and the problems the media face in provinces with large ethnic communities, Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti. Let me begin by saying that the media play the role of socialization, so I will focus on what the media's objectives are in these regions and to what extent these objectives facilitate the process of civil integration of ethnic minorities. This is how I see the process of integration: the media should enable the minorities to have their voice heard at a national level at the same time, the media should convey and protect their interests. Tbilisi should hear about those provinces, and the provinces should hear about Tbilisi. In this sense, it is very important for the minorities to know about not only the Tbilisi context, but also a broader context as well, namely, that of the entire Caucasus region. To achieve this, the objectives of media organizations should be clearly defined, they should have human and technical resources, an established structure, and interest groups which support them.

Here are the questions which will help me analyze the problem from the standpoint of civil integration:

1. To what extent do the media facilitate civil integration of the non-Georgian-speaking population?
2. How well do they make the local minorities' voice heard in the central media?
3. How well do they represent the population's interests at the local level?
4. Are their organizational goals in conformity with the aforementioned issues?

5. Are their journalists' skills adequate for the fulfillment of these objectives?
6. Is their technical infrastructure adequate for the fulfillment of these objectives?
7. Is the structure of society in conformity? Under whose influence are the media?

Let me cite some Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli statistics from the *Georgian regional media map* project here, which are descriptive of the situation. From among the general data, the most interesting thing to me is that both provinces are represented in the central media in almost exactly equal shares.

Here are the general data for these provinces: Kvemo Kartli occupies 8.8% of the country's territory, Samtskhe-Javakheti – 9.3%. Kvemo Kartli's population is 11.3% of the Georgian total, Samtskhe-Javakheti's – 4.7%; 9% of the total number of the Georgian media sources (not counting Tbilisi-based media) operate in Kvemo Kartli, and 10% – in Samtskhe-Javakheti. Twelve newspapers are printed in Kvemo Kartli, which is 10% of the country's print media (outside Tbilisi), and there are nine papers in Samtskhe-Javakheti, which is 8% of the country's total. Three TV and radio companies broadcast from Kvemo Kartli (7% of the Georgian regional electronic media), and seven – from Samtskhe-Javakheti (16% of the Georgian regional electronic media).

Despite this setting, the regional media are unable to supply impartial information to the public and lag quite far behind the public demands. Journalists' skills are limited: insufficient knowledge of modern technologies, lack of skills required to find information and respondents; weak ties with the central media. Ties with the international media are effectively nonexistent beyond the context of their relations with the Armenian and Azerbaijani media.

The aforementioned project aims to develop the existing resources and enable media organizations to create a communication network at the regional, Georgian, and South Caucasus levels. Achieving this goal will help the local public to be informed and intensify its civic efforts on the one hand and broaden their political horizon on the other.

Lela Inasaridze: Paata, the figures you cite are different by now. The percentages have changed. There are two newspapers in Akhaltsikhe, there are no newspapers in Ninotsminda and Aspindza.

Zviad Koridze: There is a paper in Ninotsminda! Although its issues are not so regular, but still...

Paata Gurgeniidze: At any rate, according to my data, Samtskhe-Javakheti was represented by a larger number of media organizations than was Kvemo Kartli. Another important distinction between these two provinces is the number of TV stations, which is greater in Samtskhe-Javakheti than in Kvemo Kartli. In other words, Kvemo Kartli stands out for its number of newspapers, and Samtskhe-Javakheti – for its numerous TV stations. The linguistic pattern of the population translates into the linguistic pattern of the TV stations. Mainly Georgian-language newspapers are printed in Georgian-speaking districts. There is only one bilingual newspaper in Samtskhe-Javakheti, the one you represent, and it was founded with support from an international organization.

Lela Inasaridze: How up-to-date is your information?

Paata Gurgeniidze: Two years old. And I think that the current situation is not much different. The local media do not report on the ethnic policy, ethnic agenda, or even the international agenda which is so important for Georgia. The public learns nothing of these things from the local media. And we, the residents of Tbilisi, are just as alienated from Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli. We know nothing about these provinces.

Neither the local nor the central media seem to be able to have our voice heard there and vice versa. Perhaps lack of journalistic skills and technical resources are among the hindering factors. However, we know countless examples of how quickly the situation can be improved. I still want to discuss the goal and objectives of the local media, what special interest groups stand behind the media, and who sets the media's goals.

Both regions are similar in that both the newspapers and TV stations have less motivation to inform the public. They are not

particularly concerned about supplying the news to the public, or some information which would act as a socialization agent. They are more motivated to earn some commercial revenues from classifieds, obituaries, congratulation notices, and to produce entertainment shows to attract the audience. There are exceptions too, for example, attempts to translate the Georgian-language news and publish them in the local media. Many TV stations use this tactic, and are quite popular too. Scarcity or total absence of the local news is the weakness of the local media in both provinces. But the difference between the two regions became clear to me when I analyzed the difference between Akhalkalaki and Akhaltsikhe. There are more attempts in Akhaltsikhe to make the media a source of information and a socialization agent, in contrast to Akhalkalaki, where there is the same number of media sources. By comparison, Kvemo Kartli too lags behind Akhaltsikhe in this respect. The structural factors which influence the media account for this.

We noted that the local self-government bodies influence the leading print media. There are groups which sponsor the TV stations and newspapers to lobby their particular business interests. But there were also agents of influence who represented precisely the civil sector. We should not forget about the political parties' influence too. We should view the parties as part of the civil sector. And of course, there is the influence of nongovernmental organizations. This is precisely the area in which Akhaltsikhe is different. The TV stations in Akhaltsikhe were also under the political parties' influence, which is why the media in Akhaltsikhe are more of a socialization agent and discuss the problems of ethnic minorities – at least, the local ethnic minority communities have more opportunities to learn about the national agenda – than in Akhalkalaki or any district of Kvemo Kartli except the predominantly ethnic Georgian-populated districts of Kvemo Kartli, which are not very bad in this respect. But what I wanted to say is connected with traditional influences. In the districts with large population of ethnic minorities, the local media sources tend to focus on the countries speaking the same language. Ethnic Armenians, especially in Akhalkalaki, are more interested in the developments in Armenia. The news agencies cater to this demand too, including *A-Info*, whose entire output is dedi-

cated to Armenia and Armenian communities abroad without any reporting on Georgia's domestic affairs. The same happens in Kvemo Kartli. There are media sources there which operate on the basis of Azerbaijan's national agenda.

I want to say in conclusion that it is very important for the media to tackle infrastructure-related problems in these provinces. The media's objectives should be defined more clearly, and influence groups which support them should act in a more forthcoming way. Among these groups I would highlight the civic groups which work toward civil integration. These problems can be overcome if these groups work purposefully. Otherwise, the situation will remain the same or even worsen. If the media develop without these influences, the provinces, traditionally closely linked to their mother countries, will not change their attitudes, and the trend might become even stronger.

Discussion:

Lela Inasaridze: First of all, I want to note that the present-day reality in Samtskhe-Javakheti is indeed different from Mr. Gurgeni's narrative. True, there were newspapers which were subsidized by the local self-government, but unfortunately or otherwise, they are no longer funded by the local self-government in any way, so we effectively do not have any newspapers in Aspindza and Adigeni any more. However, two downright party newspapers were founded in Borjomi. One is pro-opposition and the other belongs to the National Movement [ruling party]. As for Akhaltsikhe, only our newspaper and the University newspaper are published there. There in effect are no periodicals in Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda. The papers are printed only when they want to print them. In principle, our newspaper is the only regional newspaper which is printed every week.

I want to introduce our paper to those who do not know about it. It has four pages in the Armenian language and four pages in Georgian. So it is two newspapers. And as to the papers' being under the political parties' influence, I disagree, because politicians prefer TV stations as a medium. We are the only periodical in Samtskhe-Javakheti. And we have never really experienced this type of influence.

Paata Gurgenidze: I did not mean the newspapers, only the TV stations. They were under the parties' influence from the very outset.

Malkhaz Saldadze: Let me intercede and make a brief comment. The data from the second edition of the media map were found during the study which was conducted at the time which is shown in the text. Things always change and develop fast. So I simply wanted to remind you that the statistics in the *Media Map* refer to that particular phase of the study.

Lela Inasaridze: The TV stations in Akhaltsikhe were founded with an eye to political parties. Properly speaking, there is only one TV station in Akhaltsikhe at present; the second was closed down precisely for political reasons. So now we have only one TV station.

Zviad Koridze: However, all the TV companies in Samtskhe-Javakheti at present operate under the single broadcasting licence.

Lela Inasaridze: Unfortunately, the best TV station which operated in Samtskhe-Javakheti – and everyone who knows the situation there will agree – was the TV station which did not get the licence. It was the only station with funding from all international organizations. It had the equipment of the kind that is still hard to come by in any regional station even now. It was the *Lomsia* channel. It was not allowed to broadcast under that common licence precisely for political reasons. Besides, the results of the study (*Georgian Regional Media Map*) may effectively be already irrelevant now; let me say again that our paper, *Samkhetis Karibche*, is the only newspaper in the region. I cannot really say that our paper is mostly features and opinions. The paper is really news-oriented, which is why it is in demand. Our paper has some 2,000 subscribers in Samtskhe-Javakheti; in other words, two thousand people really get our newspaper. The Armenian-language part has a particularly large circulation.

It has to be noted that journalistic professionalism is the prevalent problem. The only newspaper whose journalists attended comprehensive training courses is *Samkhetis Karibche*. The *Institute for War and Peace Reporting's* assistance was the decisive factor here. But we failed to train journalists in Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda.

Paata Gurgenidze: You mentioned training, Lela, but what skills do you think journalists from Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda lack?

Lela Inasaridze: Paata Veshapidze will agree with me that there exists no journalist as such there.

Paata Veshapidze: Samtskhe-Javakheti has a very closed and secretive society. When you ask a journalist why he or she did not report a problem, the answer is: “How can you talk about this? How can you make this public?” This is a serious problem, this not an individual occurrence. This is urgent and has to be dealt with. They are not prone to socialization.

Avto Jokhadze: I have to make an objection. Paata, you said that something has to be done to change the orientation toward the mother country. The brunt of the effort should shift toward creation of civil society organizations and cooperation with them. In these provinces, the government policy is more influential and important, especially in the economic sector. What will happen if new interests emerge? I think that the government policy cannot be ignored here. Of course, this shows in the media too. The media cover not only civil society, but also the government policy too.

Paata Gurgenidze: The problem is precisely lack of appropriate support by the media. The media is failing to meet the demand, cannot manage to supply local news to the public, although it is clear that the people talk about them anyway. An example was cited in the study of the regional media: when [late Prime Minister] Zurab Zhvania was visiting the region, the media did not report on the visit at all, while the public talked much about the possible reasons for the visit, and there were plenty of rumours. This is the fact which indicates that the public is interested, but the media, as a socialization agent, is unable to perform this function, and there are structural reasons for this. If there are political or business interests behind the media, the media sources become their mouthpieces, and public interests are left out of the scope of their activities. This is why there is a need to intensify the nongovernmental organizations’ efforts and help establish civic views in society. For the media to

play the role of a socialization agent and facilitate integration, civil society ought to put forth efforts. The state's role cannot be decisive in the regional media because the state does not have any institutional mechanisms to influence the media or ensure pluralism and public discussion.

Giorgi Shubitidze: During the project, we did some work both in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli. Leaders of local political groups were interviewed in both regions, and all of them tended to stay more within nationalist rather than civil discourse. The cultural and political agenda was more important for them than the social one. Besides these interviews, we held focus group discussions with ordinary members of the local public. We asked them what expectations they had for the media. In contrast to representatives of different political groups, ordinary citizens did not speak about political programmes of a declarative nature; their interests were mainly focused on social and economic issues. The major difference between Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli was that the public in Kvemo Kartli is trying harder to take part in local self-governance. Ethnic confrontations came into focus only when the issue of land distribution was brought to the fore. In addition, there was another serious problem, which will probably be taken into account during your project, Paata. It is the language problem. Residents of Kvemo Kartli villages cannot speak or read Georgian, and they have forgotten Russian. How can we supply information to those people? Naturally, they prefer to buy a newspaper which printed in some Armenian or Azerbaijani town and which does not write about the situation in their province. But these papers do create fertile soil for political speculation about the local developments and shunting civic activities into extremist channels. Accordingly, the opposite results can be yielded if civil society becomes more active and if the media, in cooperation with civil society, fills the information vacuum which exists there.

Paata Veshapidze: I want to say more about Javakheti. Incidentally, the idea of *Samkhetis Karibche* was precisely to deliver to the local population their regional paper in their native language. The local residents were initially sceptical toward the newspaper: "This is done

from Tbilisi, so what can be local about it?" I keep saying: Let us ask the people what they want. Let them talk about whatever they want to discuss. If they want to discuss autonomy, let them do that; let us give them a possibility; let us tell them that it is their paper. Eventually, they will believe that such a thing is possible. Perhaps a very stern tradition is one of the reasons; effectively, there was not even a sign of the independent media there.

Hayk Petrosyan: Perhaps the role of the state has to be factored in too. The people do not trust the state any more. Let us take social problems, for example. The state is unable to meet the local public's requirements.

Paata Veshapidze: I agree, they are not convinced that the state deems these people part of Georgia. There is no trust they will be seen as compatriots. I will cite one example, although I do not have proper statistics. Perhaps you all remember that the Defense Ministry was to buy potato crop from the locals [amid disturbances in Samtskhe-Javakheti, caused by the Georgian Government's decision to demand withdrawal of the Russian military base in Akhalkalaki]. However, the promise was not kept. The local population takes note of these sorts of promises.

Hayk Petrosyan: I would add that there was talk about developing small businesses, that presumably something was to be built after the withdrawal of the Russian base, which would help small businesses establish themselves, and so on and so forth. But in the province, there are more examples of hindering businesses than of helping them. For example, businessmen were detained a few days ago, they were asked to pay a huge amount for the import of goods which they had been told would be exempt from all duties.

The Georgian central media slander or discredit the ethnic minorities. I have yet to see a normal programme. What is to be shown about ethnic Azeris? That they are heroin dealers. What they show about ethnic Armenians? Protest rallies and raiding of a customs station. And ethnic Ossetians? They are selling our property, and so forth. They only show negative reports about the ethnic minorities. This is precisely what irritates people in Kvemo Kartli

and Samtskhe-Javakheti. They do not trust either the country or the incumbent authorities in particular. It would be good if the media reported at least on arts, folklore and the local theatre. This would make the rest of Georgia realize that those who live here are ordinary people, not “Georgia’s enemies”.

Beka Bajelidze: There were not papers in those provinces for years. There were papers which were only printed in the run-up to the elections and were in service of some political group. *Samkbrethis Karibche* is the first independent and regular newspaper in years. This paper has been in print for three years, trying to accomplish what the media should have accomplished before. *Samkbrethis Karibche* is a good example of how to publish a paper which is interesting to the public without strict cultural and political limitations in a province with large ethnic communities.

Marina Elbakidze: I have a slightly rhetorical but important question. There are effectively no free media in the provinces – I mean Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti. However, we made a correction to this premise in the course of this discussion by saying that there is some free media agent of sorts. Given that the topic is the media and the minorities’ rights, I have a question: If there are no or very few free media in provinces and perhaps in the entire Georgia, how should we protect these civil rights and minorities’ rights? And – this is precisely the rhetorical part of it – what should we do about the independence issue? What is the ratio and share of the independent and dependent media in general and in particular, in the provinces, where people fear expressing their views? What are the prospects, if there are any?

Beka Bajelidze: I can supply part of an answer: The potential for economic sustainability is very low in these provinces. The papers still exist because of donors’ assistance.

Marina Elbakidze: Of course, with donors’ assistance. In fact, if there is no donor, there will be no paper there.

I will ask one more question: What is the strategy or guiding principle of founding media organizations in Georgia? Say, there are

media who are putatively pro-opposition or putatively pro-government. How are journalists themselves distributed in the media sector? Who goes where and why?

Paata Gurgeni*dz*e: The project which is to be launched by the Caucasus Institute on 1 March seeks precisely to boost cooperation between the regional and Tbilisi media. We will try to train journalists using mechanisms that are available to us. We want to start training courses right away. No matter what media sources a journalist represents, he or she should function as an independent journalist. They have to have their say in the central media.

Nino Danelia: The government policy was mentioned here. Of course, this is the decisive factor when we talk about civil integration. Because the government is not represented here, I think that no less responsibility lies at the media's door. Ethnic and religious intolerance and hostile environment are largely perpetuated by the central media. This is not the problem of only the Georgian media. Prominent scientist Edward Said pointed out in his research on the US media that precisely they create the Muslim World and its negative stereotype. I think that the central media are of paramount importance in general prevention of establishing such stereotypes in public sentiments.

Zviad Koridze: I will continue along Nino's lines. The problem of official language is extremely acute in these provinces. When we talk, say, about local journalists' involvement, I am certain that all the Georgian media sources will stipulate the same conditions as the state did to local residents. Without any compromise or transitional period, they put it bluntly: "You must speak official language." This is why there shall be problems there. I was particularly interested in Ninotsminda. There was an extreme shortage of journalists there. One journalist worked in your paper, *Samkhebtis Karibche*, but was eventually sidelined. And journalists who have problems with official language will always have this problem. This is why we should not make such stipulations for those people at present.

Lela Inasaridze: That is not a problem in our paper. On the contrary, what we demand is Armenian and Russian.

David Paichadze: Let me draw your attention to a completely different kind of a problem. If you take a closer look, all the media sources without exception – TV stations, radios and newspapers – mostly do not have local correspondents. There is no media organization with a countrywide network of correspondents who know the local situation. The TV stations which are not short of money do not do this. There was more of this before, but then they stopped doing this. Let me cite an example. You remember what started on 19 July and ended on 19 August 2004 [resumption of hostilities in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone]. Goga Aptsiauri, who is a good and tireless journalist and a very good reporter, produced reports for one of the Tbilisi-based TV stations. He produced live reports from there several times a day, and he did not mind. Sometimes he would get up at 3 o'clock in the morning, go somewhere in the forest and report from there. In total, he produced 89 reports in one month, and after all this, the TV station paid him a 67-lari salary. No sooner they paid it to him than he left the station.

Ketino Mishveladze: Another very bad trend is noticeable, Batono [Georgian polite form of address] Dato. Tbilisi, that is, the central TV stations, are interested only in scandals. We have contacts with their correspondents, and there are countless interesting issues. We have asked them to produce reports on some issues, but they would tell us that they would not be aired, not included in the programme, and so on.

Ia Bobokhidze: Such is the central TV stations' attitude toward the regional problems.

Lasha Chkhikvishvili: I want to go back to the problem of language barrier and at the same time I want to make a statement on the central media's attitude toward the ethnic minorities. The Georgian Public Broadcaster is launching a project targeting the ethnic minorities. We want to bring reports on current developments from the provinces and broadcast them. But we have run into a major problem which we have already discussed here – the language problem. The launch of the programme got dragged out for a long

time, and one of the reasons why the programme is not on the air is that it is still unclear in which language it should be produced. Although our target group is the entire Georgian population, which made us choose Georgian as the working language, there is a risk that the ethnic minorities might be left out of our audience. In these provinces, the majority of ethnic communities do not speak the country's official language. So the problem is very acute.

SECTION 2: MEDIA AND THE AUTHORITIES

Freedom of the media and public accountability: Relations with the authorities, ethical norms, and ways of practicing them in the Georgian media sector

Paata Veshapidze – The 24 Saati newspaper

The authorities are directly associated with the issues of the freedom of the media and professional ethics in the media, so I will perhaps focus on these issues. Overall, the media and the authorities are interconnected and at the same time antagonistic to some extent; after all, the media is one of the watchdog institutions too. The media's foremost mission is to inform the public on everything that the authorities do. The media should enable the public to make an informed, thoughtful and qualified choice to elect the authorities which are best for it. The share of confrontation is naturally great in these relations. No matter how many opinions we might hear about the media's role in the nation's political life, being a watchdog is still the main thing for the media. The media produce their most interesting reports on these issues, and in my opinion, the sphere is most relevant to public demands. The situation is effectively the same all over the world.

When we talk about relations between the authorities and the media and the latter's independence, I think that it is impossible to talk about it in absolute terms. It would be more accurate to talk

about the different degrees of independence of the media sources. The degree of independence has a few other components, and one of the main components is the financial and economic situation of the media and self-sustainability. A media source should be financially self-sustainable to avoid first of all coming under government groups' and, less importantly, some other business or political groups' influence and control. It is easy to propose some survival money, some resources to a financially unsustainable media source and then establish total control over it for the one who pays the paper. The existence of this type of sponsorship is bad for the media in another sense as well. The media source will be forced to reckon with not only its sponsor and influence agent, but also with many other different groups and influential actors which are associated with the sponsor. These sorts of ties tend to branch out, and the degree of the media source's independence is steadily decreasing.

Another significant aspect of the media's independence is institutional mechanisms of internal and external regulation. This issue is difficult to even discuss because it is very hard to agree on the criteria which will help us draw a distinction between the consistent adherence to ethical norms, external monitoring, and censorship or self-censorship. This is not only Georgia's problem. A serious discussion is under way on this issue in other countries too. In the West, the problem is resolved by ensuring that the internal and external mechanisms of regulation of media organizations are not monopolized by any single body and creating different regulatory and self-regulatory councils and organizations, which are elected by the media organizations themselves. At present, self-regulation is the only mechanism which mediates relations between the authorities and the media. It acts as a buffer of sorts and ensures that the media are protected from the authorities. Self-regulation makes it possible for the media to correct the mistakes which it has made in its relations with the public using its own resources, before some government institution interferes in relations between the media and the public. This is why I think that the media enjoy a higher degree of independence where advanced self-regulatory mechanisms exist.

The third aspect of media independence – and perhaps I can tell you this based on my own experience – is relations with the

authorities and the media's independence. For example, the *24 Saati* newspaper, which I represent and of which I am a co-owner, holds a major government contract. It is a customer order to print government invitations to tender announcements. The contract makes up for roughly 25% of our paper's annual budget, which is a substantial amount, so we are trying our best to keep this contract. The contract was assigned to us through competitive bidding. In general, government contracts are considered very good contracts internationally, for these are stable contracts which are least susceptible to fluctuations in the business environment. Despite the fact that the contract is very valuable and important to me, I still think that the assignment of the contract was mismanaged. It should have been diversified and distributed among different newspapers, which would enable us to avert a monopoly on a certain type of service. That 25% of our newspaper's budget is secured does not mean that *24 Saati* is now loyal to anyone, by no means. But the paper was assigned the contract because we never chased any sensational materials. We have always been trying to be a factual, informative, respectable paper which calls a spade a spade but does not go much beyond that and does not libel or praise anyone. From this point of view, it is interesting that our financial situation enabled us to commission articles, besides Georgian analysts, from experts like Vladimir Socor [Senior Fellow of the Jamestown Foundation] and David Smith [Senior Fellow at the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies and at the Georgian Foundation for Security and International Studies]. They send us an article once a week. I cannot tell Socor that he must write good things about the Georgian authorities, and he often does not. Accordingly, if I was loyal to the authorities because of this contract, I would not even take the risk of inviting Socor to write for the paper. This was one more proof that the contract did not make us start serving anyone's interests.

In conclusion, I want to say that the media in Georgia are more or less independent, at least more than before the revolution, but if we look at the aforementioned aspects, especially the media's self-sustainability as a business, its degree of independence is not high. This is why the absence of censorship in the country is not the only factor which determines how independent the media are.

Discussion:

Avto Jokhadze: If we concede that the media are first and foremost part of civil society and only then – business operations, then we can say, can't we, that the media are indisputably independent when they receive assistance and support from nongovernmental and international organizations.

Paata Veshapidze: It is very hard to find the golden mean here. I can tell you one thing for certain, though. If you set a right objective for the editorial office, if your mission statement sounds right despite the economic situation, you might get a product, at least in the print media, which will attest to a high degree of independence. In addition, we should not forget that the media is a specific business in which you are achieving your goals on the one hand and selling your product on the other. In other words, your audience should approve of your work. And you must keep and enlarge your audience because revenues in the media business come not from sales, but from advertisements. It is interesting in this respect that even in the United States – let us take the New York Times as an example – only 25% of revenues come from sales, of which 90% are subscriptions and no more than 7-10% retail sales. Accordingly, if you own a newspaper, you should spare no effort to make your approval rating and your audience attractive for businesses which will place commercial advertisements. In light of this complex context, it is clear that adhering to its principles and carrying out its mission alone is not an end in itself for a newspaper, it should also be successful as an organization and survive, so it is not only part of civil society, but also a business.

Maia Qalabegashvili: I have a question about orders from organizations. When a contract is signed on government or business orders, should it be a point of negotiations that they only get newspaper space and that getting financial revenues from them does not mean that they will not be criticized? In other words, when the talks are under way, do you have to explain to them that the presence of their ads in the paper does not rule out the possibility of critical articles against them in the same paper?

Paata Veshapidze: Of course, there is no need to explain this in normal societies, but whenever this is necessary, we should explain this to them. For example, I have once told one of the pharmacy networks: “What I can do for you is that I will not print an article about you on the commercial ads page.”

Ia Bobokhidze: Let us briefly go back to Batoni Paata’s issue. How free are the media today according to the criteria which he highlighted in his speech? I will talk about the examples from the regional media, in this case, about our newspaper. To what extent is it financially self-sustainable? How close is it to professional standards in terms of adherence to ethical norms? And how successful is it at keeping the authorities at a distance and playing the role of a watchdog?

I want to say that *Akhali Gazeti* learned a lot with support from the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* and other donor organizations. We are better now both in terms of professional activities and in terms of sorting out our internal management system. Precisely the aspiration and attempts to get closer to these principles and professional standards made the paper what it is now. We do not use catchy headlines to sell the paper and we do not exercise yellow journalism standards. Accordingly, our readership is smaller than any of the yellow papers. Our position in the advertising and, in general, media market is not so strong, and our paper did not become financially self-sustainable. We did not choose the model which Batoni Paata spoke about. Instead, we tried to determine exactly who our readers are, what market we are working in, for whom we create the product of this quality, and only then sell our readership to the advertiser. But unfortunately, the advertising market is not developed in provinces, and because of the small customer base, the few existing advertisers do not show interest in us.

The problems which exist today and pose some threat to the independence of the media fit into the context of the country’s development and are associated with the social, economic and political situation which the state and society are yet to overcome.

The role of the media in the development of local self-governance and ensuring of its transparency

Zviad Koridze – independent expert

In the situation that has taken shape, the central media have completely delegated the issue of local self-governance to the regional media. I think that this is a major national issue: what system of local self-governance will be created in the country is of course not only the provinces' concern. I want to recall a detail from Nino Danelia's speech, on giving more possibilities to people to take part when the government makes decisions. Her speech made it clear that 17% of the total number of respondents thinks that this is necessary. I will try not to generalize on this figure, but we will all agree that the extent of civic involvement in social and political processes is generally very low. For example, according to the study, everyone agrees that environment has to be protected, but this should be done by the state. The logic is: "I should not get involved in this, I should not do this, resolving this problem should not concern me." As if the state was not each of its citizens. This means that those citizens and social groups are giving just one person the right to say that he is the state. And we end up with what we asked for. In my opinion, if the extent of citizens' involvement sanitizes social and political processes, the extent of their awareness is the cause of their involvement and participation. I believe that these are the two important issues which should facilitate the creation of a real self-governance system. I mean not only the local self-government body as prescribed by the law, but real self-governance with participation of local communities. Let us take the experience of the latest two local self-government elections as an example. In 2002, when the ruling political force provided unilateral information to the public, the media and the nongovernmental sector, which back then was still strong, acted as a counterbalance, ensuring civic activity and generally high interest toward the elections. In 2006, before the next elections, a different situation took shape. The media proved unable to inform the public because it had hard time understanding the new law itself, so it could not explain it to the public.

Neither did politicians manage to explain it, and citizens' questions – whom they elected and for what purpose – remained unanswered. After the 2006 local self-government elections, we ended up with virtually single-party local self-government bodies on the one hand and the public whose participation in the election of the local self-governments was minimal on the other.

After drawing the general picture, I will now try to demonstrate how relations between the media and the local self-government are developing in Georgia and what patterns are getting established. I get the impression that the local self-government is much more knowledgeable of what it is doing, for it is quite purposeful at whatever it is doing. The first and important step was completely ignoring the local media. The local authorities are not particularly interested in how they will be presented in the local media, but they are very interested in how their activities are reported in the central media. The tactic which both the local authorities and the local political elite resorted to in dealing with the local media, which included bribing, buying over, and so on, was no less sensible. If we look at the results of the 2006 local elections, we will see that a great deal of local journalists, who for all these years had been trying to be active and report many problems, are now members of local legislatures. I discovered in two districts of Kakheti, Gurjaani and Dedoplistsqaro, that many journalists joined local government bodies and became officials. "Journalists got tired" – was the explanation. Journalists got tired because the media business is coming into being with great difficulties and because they cannot put up resistance to the pressure from both the local authorities and the law enforcement bodies. This is why they are trying their best not to waste the credit they have earned and use it to, say, make it to the local government body.

It is a fact that the surviving part of the media is left alone, effectively without its main partner, the public. One of the important objectives of the local media is to revive the public as its main supporter and partner. Civic values may not be strong among the public, and it may be trying at present to take advantage of the authorities' steps and derive benefits from them, so it will probably not break its back for the sake of liberal values or in support of

the principle of the freedom of speech. This is why the media themselves should be more active to rebuild their partnership with the public and somehow make citizens' involvement in local self-governance more effective.

Issues like monitoring of local budget are often raised in the papers. It is interesting to see how eagerly journalists report on budget problems. But their investigations mostly remain only on the pages of these newspapers and do not become subject of discussion for a particular community to which they should be the most painful issue. The articles often end with phrases like "we were unable to find the information...". Public information, which by law should be open to every interested individual, is absolutely unavailable and inaccessible because of journalists' insufficient knowledge of the law.

The local self-governance system, which has become an entity which is completely isolated from society, will do its best to conceal all information. Even proceedings which are supposed to be transparent – for example, local legislature meeting in Gurjaani to elect the head of the local administration – are closed for the local press. Of course, this is a legal violation. One of the media sources reacted to this and filed a suit. The process is still under way, and I learned yesterday, completely by accident, that the judge refused to initiate the proceedings. In other words, they stop at nothing to avoid hearing this case. And they are trying hard to avoid discussions on this issue.

The media have to work hard on this issue. We should use courts, and they are a good instrument too, if not to put pressure on the local authorities, then at least to influence public attitudes by making the issue public. If all the media sources start using this lever, they will put both the local authorities and the courts in an awkward situation. They should get tired of the suits filed for formality's sake and of endless public discussions on this issue. Eventually, they will have to make concessions. Ultimately, the media will succeed at bringing about the situation in which information will be accessible to them and readily available to the public. Unless rapport is established between the media and the public, the 2010 local self-government elections might yield the same or worse results. Accordingly, responsibility lies with the media today.

Discussion:

Nino Danelia: I think no one will argue that the media's role in local self-governance is ensuring availability and accessibility of information to the public. Obviously, if information is withheld, it is hard to achieve transparency of local self-government bodies' activities. Both the local and central authorities know this very well. Perhaps you will agree that the main problem of the majority of the local media today is access to information, but despite this, a knowledgeable and experienced journalist can still use alternative sources. He or she can gather groups of people or analysts and discuss different developments. The view that you will go to court and your suit will be upheld is a delusion. In this respect, some success is possible if a general broad solidarity of the Georgian media takes shape on a particular issue. This is why I think that the solidarity of the media is very important.

Paata Veshapidze: This is precisely where the self-regulation issue comes into play too. Any unity around this issue will already constitute one of the institutions of the media sector.

Zviad Koridze: And this is when a "self-revelation" of sorts will take place too. Transparency of information for all the media sources is important.

Ia Bobokhidze: I want to touch on several issues which were already discussed here. I will focus on a few more issues which Batoni Zviad noted.

First, specifically which problems do the local media encounter in relations with the local authorities? First and foremost, it's the lack of professionalism of local self-government bodies. We might say that local self-governments have incompetent staff.

Second and just as important problem to me, an ordinary journalist, is a conflict of interest which is taking shape directly within the media sector and which is already going beyond the limits of rivalry. I mean journalists who work at newspapers and regional and local authorities' press services at the same time. In my capacity of editor of one of the newspapers, I have my own ethical code and

my own self-regulation tools, and my relations of this kind with my journalists are described in the contracts we signed. We will not allow our cooperation with the authorities to transform into an organizational blending with them, but I cannot understand how it can be in line with journalistic ethics when local correspondents of the central electronic media and different leading news agencies are at the same time staff or heads of local self-government departments or regional administrations. This is precisely what causes selective release of information or hushing up of pressing issues. For example, if the local administration deems it inexpedient to make something public, its press service, whose head combines the job of some leading news agency's correspondent, will not disseminate the information via his or her news agency and certainly will not supply it to media sources which are not linked with the authorities.

The third problem, which was very important to me, and Batoni Paata spoke about it, has to do with civil society. To me, this is a broad concept, and by civil society I mean the media as well as nongovernmental organizations. Unfortunately, here too lack of competence and human and intellectual resources is noticeable, especially in provinces. Expert knowledge too is mainly concentrated in Tbilisi. If you need advice on some issue, you have to invite an expert from Tbilisi.

We are trying to monitor the activities of the local self-government and concentrate especially on the local elections and budget, as well as on the process of making government decisions. Accordingly, we take measures to ensure that the information is publicly available. Of course, we are trying to do all this, but I cannot say that it is easy.

And one more thing that comes on top of all this is that the authorities themselves are indifferent to the local media. Making statements for the central media is a much higher priority for them. For example, the president's representative in Imereti region opened a new medical clinic in Kutaisi on 8 February, King David the Builder's Commemoration Day. A doctor who treated George Bush was visiting and performed several major surgical operations. Central TV stations told their correspondents to produce a report on that. At the same time, the regional administration informed journalists to

show up immediately and film how the governor lays a wreath at the King David monument. Journalists phoned their producers and were told to stay put until they record the scheduled interview. The surgery took five hours. What happened next was that the governor postponed all scheduled events until the cameramen from the central TV stations became available.

Maia Qalabegashvili: It was said here that it is very important when the media people demonstrate solidarity in some situations. Batoni Zviad mentioned that many journalists joined local administrations. I can specify that four journalists went there in Gurjaani, which is a lot for one province. Many wanted to go, but some were not accepted. The contrary also happens: former officials start working in the media. I cannot help asking whether one should trust and support those who worked in the government yesterday and now work in the media. Unfortunately, often they find themselves sidelined in the media, we do not trust them any more, and end up with disunited media which cannot demonstrate solidarity.

As for our relations with local self-government bodies, the situation in Kakheti is changing, but not for the better. New faults are showing up. If before the governor at least answered the phone, now we communicate with him using text messages. When we are trying to find the information, every agency operating in the province today is heavily dependent on the centre. In other words, not a single department, be it electricity distribution, health care, or any other government organization, will make a comment without permission from Tbilisi.

Paata Veshapidze: Same here, Maia, until the president says so, no one makes comments.

Maia Qalabegashvili: In short, these are the current pressing problems. As for the incompetence of the local self-government bodies, it is obvious. For example, no one can explain to you why the local administration's meeting was closed for journalists 10 minutes before it began.

Ketino Mishveladze: I want to add that the personnel policy is very nontransparent. We do have access to budget-related informa-

tion, but we are unable to access any information on the personnel policy: who is appointed, why, and by which criteria that person was selected.

Paata Veshapidze: There is one practical issue on which I have my own opinion, but I am also interested in this audience's opinion too. Representatives of the local media often have to deal with the question whether or not they should sell a newspaper page to the local self-government if it wants to buy one. I always tell them: "Of course you should sell it. But you do not assume any obligations by doing this, you simply sell it, that's it." So I am interested whether this form of relations with the local self-government is acceptable, both in theoretical and practical terms, or not. Why should a paper not sell a page to the local self-government? Why should the public view this as an alliance between the paper and the authorities?

Zviad Koridze: If you sell your page to the local administration and it publishes its materials, information on the budget, or an article on the local administration head – how he cares about the homeless, the elderly and the orphans, how he pays out pensions, and so forth, this should not be a problem. There is a notice, after all, that it is an advertising page paid for by the local self-government body. But there is another aspect. It cannot be ruled out that the information which the local administration printed on its page might become a subject of journalistic investigation.

Nino Danelia: A different problem might also arise. The local government buys a page and prints positive information about itself. The media source might later want to print a critical material about the self-government, but hesitate to do so for fear of losing a major customer. Very often, when the editor comes across not only the local self-government order, but any major commercial advertisement opportunity, he or she throws the paper in the balance and vacillates whether or not staying true to the norms of journalistic ethics is worth a potentially lost commercial profit.

Beka Bajelidze: In other words, self-censorship comes into play here.

Zviad Koridze: I understand, but we are not talking about the particular facts which may serve as evidence. If the editor manages to keep his or her views, moral or journalistic integrity, from being influenced by the fact of sale of the page to the local self-government, no concessions will be made. I think that the editorial office can print an article on the same issue which the advertisement was about.

Eter Turadze: We signed a contract with the Batumi Mayor's Office, which bought our page in six issues, although the contract envisaged longer-term cooperation with us. Of course, we did not stop printing critical articles about the mayor's office. They managed, or rather, endured, to cooperate with us for the period it took us to print those six issues, and then simply cancelled the contract. I concluded that when they decided to start working with us, they thought we would stop and leave them alone for that money.

Natia Kuprashvili: We still focus on the print media, but I want to remember a television example. Ia spoke about the conflict of interest, and the example of the *Rioni* TV station in Kutaisi is very interesting because its news service staff are at the same time employees of the regional administration or the public relations service of the local administration. Accordingly, the station's news bulletins are not impartial because a journalist who produces a report on local self-government or government is also an interested party.

Zviad Koridze: A local self-government body is an entity under civil law, just like any other. If it decides to print its information or report its activities, it is up to them where and how to do it. If it is allowed to do this by law, there should be no limitations.

Maia Qalabegashvili: I have a question: say, the local administration in Gurjaani allocated 38,000 lari in the annual budget for information services. This, however, does not include the salaries for the press service staff. The money was allocated for information services. Who should get the money, who should spend the sum?

Zviad Koridze: Two years ago, the local administration in Telavi allocated 24,000 lari for information support of its activities. They

invited tenders, but ultimately, none of the papers with influence, circulation, background and reputation in Kakheti proved to win the contract. The contract went to the paper which did not exist before and was founded with that money. This is an instance of pure corruption.

Nino Danelia: It is very important to discuss the issue of government or business contracts. These are not identical things. Money from businesses in the media is a different thing, and a very good thing too, but the government money is not good. The government cannot be seen only from the commercial point of view because the government is accountable to the people, whereas private business is not accountable at all. Government officials are elected, while private business is not elected by anyone. There are completely different cause-and-effect relations in these two sectors' ties with the media. This is why we cannot use the same criteria for both of them.

**The role of the media in the formulation of the
sociopolitical agenda and shaping of public opinion:
Playing the role of a moderator between the
authorities and social groups**

Avto Jokhadze – The Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy
and Development

We have already heard the opinion that the media first and foremost impartially depict the situation, but if they only depict it, then they are failing to play the role of raising political awareness of society. But this *is* one of their functions. Whether we like it or not, the media is one of the leaders and determinants of public life, which is precisely why the media are referred to as the *fourth branch of power*. They are the tool of influencing or, if you wish, controlling the public.

Social management is based on information support. Our state and its leaders have not fully realized yet that precisely the media are the guarantors of information support. Of course, this does

not mean that the state should establish total control over the media. Participation of the media in state governance varies according to political system. To make it simple, let us discuss two main political systems, totalitarian and democratic. Notionally, it can be said that in the first case, the media is an assassin, and in the second, the rescuer.

In the totalitarian system, it is not the media who mould public opinion – the ruling elite moulds it for society using the media. In other words, the media is a passive instrument in the authorities' hands. And on the contrary, in a democracy, the public forms and expresses opinions via the media. For its part, the authorities too inform the public on their activities via the media, whereas the media itself is an independent actor.

The best thing in discussing this issue would be going back to our own history as an example. Our society is a post-totalitarian society. And as you know, the totalitarian system was nothing but an ideocratic dictatorship. You cannot do much to the dictatorship of ideology with weapons and battles. Combating it with these means is like fighting the mythological dragon which grows two heads in place of every one you cut off. History provides ample proof of this.

Before the 1917 revolution, the tsarist ideocracy existed in Russia. In 1905, a rebellion broke out against it and took the form of armed clashes in downtown Moscow and eventually, of civil war. Precisely because of the wrong choice of methods, the result of this was not the fall of the ideocratic regime, but its further tightening and convergence with totalitarianism. The dictatorship of gendarmerie, that is, of political police, was established. Society again used the method of armed uprising against that dictatorship, which resulted in an even worse, Soviet, totalitarian regime.

Under the totalitarian regime, the media came under the authorities' total control and became the propagator of the authorities' ideas. Because the Bolshevik ideology was perverse, the media which went into the service of the misanthropic ideology itself started to play the role of an "assassin."

The Georgian proverb says that wine is a cure for wine. Cure for word is also a word. That word can be cured only with word

and ideocratic violence can be neutralized only with power of word became clear during Gorbachev's Perestroika. In that period, the censorship of the media was abolished, in other words, freed from the claws of dictatorship, and the ideocratic dictatorship was defeated precisely by "Prozhektor Perestroyki" [a popular current developments programme exposing people who resisted Perestroika in early 1990's] and peaceful demonstrations (we should view rallies and demonstrations as part of the media). The only weapon of demonstrators was their words. The use of tanks against it (for example, on 9 April [1989, when pro-independence rally was raided by Soviet troops in Tbilisi]) resulted in the defeat of the totalitarian state.

By that time, the media were quite successful at destroying the existing system, but were unable to do much to build something new. Therefore, the destructive, in other words, "assassin's" role befell the media again.

As soon as the media was freed, the impression was created that the quality of journalism improved, but then it changed. The quality of journalism deteriorated, and the media became very yellow and scandal-mongerish. Why? Playing a destructive (assassin's) role was relatively easy, but when it became necessary to establish new values, the task grew harder. The media should have their concept and should be able to do analytical work too. This is a more labour-intensive and relatively more difficult job.

Overall, moulding public opinion is not only the media's work. In normal circumstances, this should be the education system's burden, but in our case, the education system was completely dismantled. In humanities, it was advocating distorted values anyway, and in the last fifteen years, it had been failing to perform its functions altogether. The ideological vacuum was created, which was filled by other ideologies. I will highlight three of them.

First was the criminal mindset. You will agree that the institution of so-called crime bosses was established not without unofficial sanction and co-participation of the Soviet regime. The security services of the period purposefully pushed the process ahead and even rooted the institution of organized crime deliberately. In Georgia, it was particularly intense. If 33% of crime lords [in the former Soviet

Union] were ethnic Russians, 31% were ethnic Georgians! That coterie had and still has a successful ideological service, which is pointed predominantly at youth. Criminal ideology became prevalent among wide strata of our society.

The second ideology which filled the vacuum was the “law of the jungle” based on the survival instinct. This ideology was worded by the man in the street roughly like this: if my child is hungry, I will cut someone’s throat but feed her, will you not do the same? This question implied an aggressive challenge and many people willy-nilly agreed...

The third ideology is church ideology. We should not delude ourselves about the Orthodox Church. Its social apolitical doctrine is the medieval imperial system which has nothing in common with democracy. This system of antidemocratic values is making headway in society and broadening its ideological influence.

The corrupt nomenclature of the Shevardnadze regime was unable to balance out any of these ideologies, on the contrary, it tolerated and even took advantage of them. In that situation, the burden of ideological support of democratization and normalization of society was mostly shifted to the media. Naturally, it was difficult, but the media still acted as a “rescuer”: The *Rustavi 2* story is characteristic in this respect.

The digit 2 which its name boasts is a memo of the struggle for survival with the authorities. The Shevardnadze regime resisted putting into operation that particular media source because it could see very well the disparaging potential of the freedom of speech, but on the other hand, the authorities also had obligations to the West not to curb the freedom of speech. At some point, the grand master of balancing [Shevardnadze] equipped himself with the “dogs and caravan” philosophy and held the ground a little longer by pretending he did not hear. But ultimately this tactic proved powerless against the media. Shevardnadze realized this and set about repressing *Rustavi 2*, which was when his regime stumbled for the first time, when he was forced to sack the entire cabinet.

The Rose Revolution soon followed. It would be redundant for me to talk about the media’s role in this historic upheaval. I will

only remind you that sometimes the Rose Revolution is called a live-report revolution. Let us not refrain at present from touching on what happened to *Rustavi 2* afterwards and which route it chose, but I think that its example clearly demonstrates the media's role of a "rescuer" in the process of implementation of the modern political and social projects.

I will be brief about the regional media. It seems to me that the regional media have resigned themselves to the idea that they should be provincial, and they limit themselves to reporting on the issues which can be of interest only to the local residents. It would be desirable, however, if they did not confine themselves to the boundaries of their regions and viewed even the everyday and regional issues through the prism of national interests. And most importantly, there is no need to limit the media source's commercial and creative interests to the borders of the region solely because the source was founded in that region.

Discussion:

Nino Danelia: Batoni Avto cited a very good example when he discussed the media's role in the revolutionary situation. A study was conducted and showed that the public realization of the necessity to change government was created precisely by the media.

Ia Bobokhidze: I want to focus on different aspects of coverage of local issues in the regional media. In our paper, for example, 60-65% of the paper space is taken by local issues. But this does not mean that everyday or pressing issues of local importance, be it social issues, education, or any other which is of interest for the local audience, should be reported on from a local perspective. There are always issues which are pressing at the local level but logically can be extrapolated to the national level. Accordingly, among our respondents may be not only representatives of the local authorities or nongovernmental sector, but also representatives of the central Georgian authorities and Tbilisi expert community too. So articles on any local issue include their comments too. We exercise a similar approach to the news as well. Depending on how pressing it is,

some 30% of it is on national-level issues and international relations. That the paper is published in Kutaisi does not at all mean that our readers are not interested in Georgia's integration into NATO or Georgia's European Neighborhood Policy Action Plan, etc. Given our resources and ambitions, we are trying to not limit ourselves to only region-specific issues.

Avto Jokhadze: Very good. I remembered something. In the early 1990's, the *Kondoli* newspaper was printed in Kakheti. The paper was printed by a single individual – with his own resources, wit, money, and everything else. It had just one page and was a great read even in Tbilisi, although the paper was exclusively about the village of Kondoli. In other words, what matters is not which part of the world you are writing about or whether you write about NATO or something else, but how you write it for your reader. I am certain that, just as provincial residents are interested in what is going in the capital, residents of Tbilisi will be interested in what is happening in Kakheti or Imereti, as long as we write about it with consideration for the reader's interests and tastes.

SECTION 3: MEDIA AND THE ECONOMY

The economy of the media: The economic foundations and sustainability of the media

Speaker: Niko Nergadze – chief editor of the Georgian edition of the Playboy magazine

It was mentioned yesterday that one of the main problems of Georgian newspapers is advertising. The point is that TV advertising is very cheap. It is true, in terms of attracting advertisers, Georgian papers compete not with one another, but with TV stations – first and foremost because, no matter how cheap advertising in the paper might be, it still costs less on TV. The sum you pay may be larger, but it is still cheap given the number of people who watch it.

What can be done about it? There are three methods. First, advertising in the paper should be cheaper than on TV. How can this be achieved? We cannot do this by cutting the prices because advertising in papers is already ridiculously cheap, and if you make it even cheaper, you won't care any more whether you have it or not. Second, circulation should be increased somehow. Third, we should take some niche, which will make it possible to attract serious advertisers, but this is not easy either, especially for regional newspapers which work for all kinds of readers. However, the strength of these newspapers is that they work for their natural niche, their region, and in this case their niche has geographic borders. I wanted to cite an example of glossy magazines, although their experience might not be relative to the press in general and the papers in particular, but some parallels can still be drawn. This is the sector of the print media which broke the deadlock in terms of advertising. Initially, when first thick glossy magazines were launched in Georgia, they did not have advertising either. Today, their advertising situation has really improved. The *Ozoni* magazine, where I worked, is not owned by particularly wealthy people or big businessmen. This notwithstanding, we had 12 pages of advertising in the very first issue. The publisher already had the experience of the *Tskheli Shokoladi* magazine, and he knew how to make advertising work. So, if you manage to prove to advertisers that their ads will reach precisely those people who need to see it, they will advertise. There are two things to keep in mind. First, you have to make the right choice about which advertiser to go to, given your audience; and second, almost none of us have know-how to work with advertisers. In the Georgian media, no one except televisions work well on attracting advertisement. Everyone has problems, and I would say that if all newspapers and magazines in Georgia had a specialist who would know whom to go to and what to tell them, and if they had more advertising agents, they would have a few more ads in their issues. This is not just the papers' problem. Even *Tskheli Shokoladi* and [Georgian version] *Cosmopolitan*, who have set up an efficient system, experience problems with workload distribution. A little more knowl-

edge, a few more employees working on this matter would do no harm to them too.

In principle, besides TV stations, another media organization in Georgia which knows how to get commercial ads is the *Fortuna* radio. The *Imedi* radio too is better off in terms of advertising compared to last year.

To attract advertisers, media sources need to increase circulation, which for now seems infeasible. There is also the need to train professionals. Heads of advertising services need more training. In many newspapers, however, this is not as big a problem as training lower-tier agents, their development, and right kind of work with them. As I know, no one except radio stations works with them the right way on a daily basis. It is difficult for advertising agents to work on their own and find advertisers. They need daily supervision, directives and corrections from the management.

One more problem of the media is that there is no independent audit of circulation. Everyone says what their circulation is, but no one tells us what their sales and subscriptions are, although this is what really matters to advertisers. They need these data to decide whether advertising in this particular paper is worth spending money.

In the past, the business sector's fear of placing advertisement used to be a major problem for the media. Most businessmen were trying to evade taxes. If they placed an ad in a paper, magazine, or on TV, this was usually a sign for the tax authorities that someone's revenues were growing and they would start auditing the company's revenues. Today, this problem does not exist any more, and the tax authorities work a different way: they do not monitor businesses' revenues by watching out for some symptoms. In addition, the tax system has been simplified. Accordingly, evasion does not make sense any more. Therefore, the media should be more active and take advantage of these changes by persuading businesses to take advertisements to newspapers.

Discussion:

Natia Kuprashvili: Niko noted that it does not make sense any more for business people to evade taxes. Unfortunately, things are

not going all that well, especially in the provinces. There, the business still has fear of the authorities. I do not know why, but they really have no desire to place ads in the local media. This is a major problem for the local media. As for major advertisers operating on the advertising market, they refrain from working with the regional media. This creates serious problems precisely with the aforementioned economic self-sustainability.

Niko Nergadze: You are right. When I spoke about tax evasion, I meant Tbilisi, but I also wanted to say that the situation in the provinces is different. Perhaps we are dealing with some irrational fears of businesses, not with real risks.

Ia Bobokhidze: I will elaborate on the speaker's subject. I just want to make brief remarks on the basis of concrete examples. The first problem which was highlighted and which I fully agree with is the shortage of qualified personnel. Thanks to donor organizations' and experts' permanent support, the issue of professional development of journalists working in the regional media has been more or less sorted out, for example, in the areas of internal management, papers' technical and visual aspects, etc. From the professional point of view, the most severe shortage and flaw which we run into every day is precisely lack of professional skills among the advertising agents and managers. We have to frequently hire new people, and our relations usually end up with nothing after some trial period. Of course, neither do we have proper conditions for training them and including them in a continuous routine. It would be desirable, therefore, if this becomes one of the priorities for donors' technical or professional assistance.

Niko Nergadze: I'll add one more thing. I worked with Ia when we visited Gurjaani. We saw that advertisements kept coming in provided that efforts in that direction were systematic. The non-separation of functions is also a problem. When the paper's editor is also the head of the advertising department, there is a problem. Different skills are required for a good editor and a good head of advertising service, and they should have different qualities. Being

a good editor does not mean that the paper will have plenty of advertising.

Ia Bobokhidze: I want to continue to talk about advertising. Subconscious fear which prevents the businesses from placing ads in papers comes from business people's belief that advertising in the paper might put their business under a major risk. In addition, we have to take into account that potential advertiser businesses and the banking sector in the provinces are affiliates of Tbilisi-based organizations, so getting contracts from them is effectively out of the question. They have to coordinate this issue with their head offices, which have already sorted out the advertising issue with the central TV stations and newspapers. However, sometimes they come to us and place ads, but this is more an exception than a rule.

When we talk about offering a right audience to the advertisers, the paper's circulation is not always the decisive factor. In our province, there is a paper which has a higher circulation, is intended for a different kind of readership and is more successful at sales too. But when the TBC Bank wanted to place one ad in a local newspaper, it chose us. They saw what we offered them, in other words, our readership was more acceptable and interesting for them.

Maia Qalabegashvili: Ia formulated the problems in the province very well. Our province has exactly the same problems. In this regard, Kakheti is still a little different because the independent newspapers of Kakheti are all printed in one small town, Gurjaani. There is neither a large advertising market nor broad readership there. Telavi and other towns of Kakheti are part of readership. As you know, there are no independent newspapers there, and the market is locked. One would have thought that in this situation, we should be in an advantageous situation, but then the local administration in Telavi founded its newspaper, which is officially independent, but in effect is funded by the local government. The local authorities directly instructed the local businesses that not a single advertising contract should go to any other paper. We have never received an ad placement

from Telavi ever since, with the exception of the two latest issues. Now that the governor has resigned, we got a few ads both from businesses and from the Department of Environment Protection.

And it is not quite true that business people are not afraid to advertise any more. I have an example. There is a gas station in Gurjaani, whose owner is originally from Telavi. He himself placed an ad of his business. Of course, we negotiated and he agreed. But some six months later he came and said that he was told he was not supposed to advertise in the *Spektri* newspaper. Perhaps it was not the tax authority, but it is clear that by putting businesses under pressure, the authorities are trying to put pressure on the papers.

Niko Nergadze: Let me continue with my subject, but I want to remark that in my opinion, the issues of working with customers are resolvable.

Distribution is also an income source. I know that you all have this problem and that it is acute too. Whenever regional TV channels are discussed, you can sense a tinge of sarcasm because their income mostly comes from obituaries, announcements, etc. I do not deem this a problem. If money comes from this kind of service, so be it. The more money comes in, the better. The bad thing is that this should not be the main source of income, this should be an extra source. In short, the regional papers should look at this issue without sarcasm.

Giorgi Shubitidze: Niko, you mentioned the absence of independent audit in Georgia, which would verify the papers' circulation figures and help build trust between the business and the paper. What prevents creation of this kind of audit service? Is it lack of professional resources or lack of initiative and openness in the media sector itself?

Niko Nergadze: Simply no one has started doing this. I do not even remember any attempts to start this type of service.

Paata Veshapidze: Carrying out this type of audit is much more difficult than studying TV channels' ratings. This type of research requires much larger investments. In addition, the methodology is complex, and adequate numbers of qualified staff are required.

Maia Qalabegashvili: I agree. But a different issue is more problematic here. The majority of the newspapers will not want to participate in this kind of research. However, the flip side is that whoever will not want to participate will give rise to doubts about the reliability of their data. Another problem is that for now we do not trust those ratings which have already been researched. Georgian rating systems are rarely trusted. Everyone thinks that they are fixed.

Niko Nergadze: They say the same about TV ratings, but everyone uses them.

Paata Veshapidze: The main benefit for us is that the potential advertisers will know for certain who is who, so for our purposes, whether or not they trust it is their problem, not ours.

Niko Nergadze: What else can be done? The main sources of income are still advertising and distribution. The paper might figure out something else, promote itself and be creative about this issue. But all this is going to be a temporary relief anyway, until the advertising market gets developed. Papers encounter one more big problem when dealing with this. There are few, say, car dealers among the advertisers, who can liven up the papers. This is common abroad. It would be good if the Georgian regional media did the same too.

Paata Veshapidze: This is common in the Georgian central media. For example, the Opel Centre prints its ads in *24 Saati*.

Paata Gurgenidze: I have a question. Why is determining the paper's circulation difficult? Maybe because the tax law is strict and papers have to hide their actual circulation?

Paata Veshapidze: The problem is that in practice, all publishing organizations keep 50% of their output “in the black”. There are papers which pay out salaries from these “black” revenues.

Beka Bajelidze: Niko mentioned dealers. This is really worth considering. People have been working on this since 2004, and progress has certainly been made in the Tbilisi media.

The papers with quotes of car prices and other information are sold in much larger numbers than other papers. So, the market itself told these people where their niche is. People took advantage of this, whereas we for some reason remain excessively loyal to social and political issues and ignore the conditions which the market dictates. These people have already occupied the niche, but it is possible to emulate this experience in regional newspapers.

Paata Veshapidze: Let me draw your attention to the distribution issue again. To increase circulation, you have to know how well your paper sells and who wants to read it. This is hard to monitor, though, so you have to rely on your distributor’s information. I, on the other hand, have a certain circulation, but do not know exactly what the sales are. It is very difficult to keep track of this. Accordingly, auditors’ job will not be easy. I am interested myself how large my readership is, but honestly, I do not know. Distributors do not specify how many papers they sell.

Paata Gurgenidze: I still do not understand what the main reason why you cannot establish what your sales are, in other words, what number of papers the distributor sells.

Paata Veshapidze: Distribution is an expensive thing, it takes serious investment. At the same time, distribution is very important for increasing circulation.

Eter Turadze: Two years ago, at the initial phase of cooperation with the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, we tried to broaden the distribution network and expand into other districts of Ajaria. We achieved major success. Our circulation was

growing weekly, but then, as you know, job cuts started at the Postal Service, and the home delivery service was abolished. This affected expansion of our network, and the paper's circulation dropped substantially.

After that, we started to think how to improve the situation. Indeed, a real distribution service is a costly luxury. We still started to make steps in that direction and got involved in the presidential employment programme. We hired many people and started to retrain them. In the end, we decided to keep 68 people on our staff. These people are already offering subscription to our paper all over Ajaria. I think that if we manage to ensure permanent monitoring of this activity, we will set up a distribution network. We will have some money at the initial stage, and we will manage to service other media sources too with our network, which will be an extra source of income for us and provide us with the network maintenance money.

Paata Veshapidze: Eteri's story is a very good example. When these things happen, circulation increases many times. *Samkbreṭis Karibche* did the same. In 2006, they started to hire distributors and, if before, they used to sell only 300 Georgian-language copies and 35 Armenian-language ones from the entire circulation, now they sell 1,600 Georgian-language copies and 600 Armenian-language ones. The circulation of the Georgian-language paper has already exceeded 2,000. This is how important a well-organized distribution network can be. We can see in this example that the circulation increased five times in four months.

Paata Gurgenidze: If one paper can set up the network that well, would it not be better if several newspapers combined their efforts? Then the results would be even better. The newspapers can cooperate in this field, and there will be no rivalry.

Paata Veshapidze: There was an attempt in the Tbilisi media. The *Rezonansi*, *Alia*, and a few other newspapers tried to set up a distribution network, but their cooperation did not yield results.

Media and the business sector: Forms of relations, consideration and coverage of interests, impact on economic development

Speaker: Paata Veshapidze – The 24 Saati newspaper

Naturally, we discuss advertising, and precisely this is relations with the business. The point is that if we take a realistic view of cooperation between the media and the business, the situation in Georgia is very far from ideal. The situation is not ripe in Georgia yet. According to all studies and all theories, the medium-sized and small business is where the media get their revenues from. The main advertising turnover comes to the media from precisely these sectors. There is a real and stiff competition between these medium-sized and small businesses, which stimulates them to concentrate even more on advertising their products and services. But in Georgia, the small and medium-size business is weak, the competitive environment has not taken shape yet, and accordingly, the sector does not feel the urgent need to advertise its products and services.

The advertising environment is not favourable to the media today. For these reasons, the only thing the media can offer to the business is its niche. If you fully understand what your niche is and you can convey this to the advertisers, it really works. My personal experience attests to this. I said yesterday and will repeat again that *24 Saati* is not an unsuccessful paper in terms of attracting advertisers compared to the general situation in Georgia. Banking is a really competitive sector. They are trying to promote their banking services well, which is why we get good advertising contracts from the banking sector. All this is completely transparent. In 2006, some 120,000 lari worth of advertising was received from that sector. The construction industry is also growing and is competitive, accordingly, advertising revenues from that sector increased too. Now car dealers have become strong enough to lobby keeping the import tax on used cars low. Therefore, they too will become more active in the media. We had very good relations with *Tegeta Motors*. They spent more than

40,000 lari on advertising in our paper. Of course, this is not too much, but, let me say this again, given the general situation, this is not bad at all.

The point is that we should work ourselves on advertising. Of course, if you go to some company in your province to ask them to advertise in your paper, they will tell you that the decisions are made in Tbilisi. So go ahead and come to Tbilisi. Securing advertising contracts takes exacting efforts. If you have to, you should go to advertisers not nine, but eighteen times, and be stubborn if need be. So keep coming to Tbilisi, and you will see that you will get an advertising contract at least in two cases out of ten.

And now another issue. It is my experience that to secure an advertising contract, it is very important to know about the business which is your potential customer. You have to be very well informed about how big a player they are in their business sector, what their strengths and weaknesses are. Otherwise your work will be ineffective.

Discussion:

Lela Inasaridze: I do not know about other provinces, but in ours there is no economic competition. You all know that the pharmacy network in Samtskhe-Javakheti is monopolized, and the construction industry too belongs to just five families. In this situation, making that kind of a businessman interested in advertising is out of the question.

Paata Veshapidze: We encountered this problem too. Personally, I decided one fine day to start doing rounds of advertisers and exercise the “coercion” method. I almost gave up after the very first attempt. I know that there are *PSP* and *Aversi* pharmacy networks. In two weeks’ time I collected some minimum amount of information on them and went to speak to them. They warmly welcomed me. Then I went to them again. In short, during the fifth visit one of the managers of *PSP* told me that the point was that both companies had the same owner and therefore there

was no competition. I mentioned that it is good when a paper has its niche and its audience, and I can bring an example. *24 Saati* went to *Caucasus Network* [internet service provider] after it purchased *Georgia Online* [its rival ISP]. In fact, we did not even want money from them, we wanted them to allocate a higher bandwidth to us, more resources for our web page, and to simplify our intercity telephone communications. We went to them and told them what we expected in return for our advertising service. They refused, but two or three months later they came themselves and asked us to advertise their service because marketing studies indicated that their subscribers read *24 Saati*. All theorists agree that the advertiser first of all needs your influence, your rating, your professionalism, and so on. This is why caring about your paper's rating and prestige is the key in relations with the business.

Natia Kuprashvili: I wonder in light of our discussion on relations between the media and the business: If the paper's owner is a businessman, what influence does this have on the marketing policy?

Paata Veshapidze: I have been both, so I can answer your question. For several years, *24 Saati* was a paper which entirely depended on one businessman. Back then, I was not interested in advertising. I knew that I would get my salary on the third day of every month, supervised the paper's content, and did not particularly worry about the paper's income.

Natia Kuprashvili: Was there no interference with content-related or any other decisions?

Paata Veshapidze: I can tell you that there was. Back then, Kitsmarishvili [Erosi Kitsmarishvili, founder of the *Rustavi 2 TV*] was the owner of the paper, and of course, there was some intervention, especially during the revolution.

SECTION 4: THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL AND DONOR ORGANIZATIONS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GEORGIAN MEDIA SECTOR

Influence of donor organizations on the organizational development and economic stability of the media

Beka Bajelidze – The Institute for War and Peace Reporting

You are all familiar with the issues I am going to discuss, but I will try to take a fresh look at them. The USAID, OSCE, European Commission, UK's DFID and other international organizations are perhaps the most active players in the field of media development. Embassies which are accredited in Tbilisi also issue grants to develop this sector. The US State Department also issues grants to international organizations which operate in Georgia and carry out media projects. The European Commission has been more active of late in carrying out small-size projects. It liaises directly with non-governmental organizations and gradually discontinues funding to go-between organizations.

There are few organizations which carry out media development projects in Georgia. Our project, *Georgian Regional Media Development and Public Accountability Project*, is one of the projects aiming at organizational and economic development of the regional media. This project was launched in 2004 and ended now. The project budget envisaged supporting the regional media, and this was the project's priority. Our objective was to put an end to the concentration of resources in the Tbilisi media and to shift attention to the provinces to bring about professional development of journalists and concentrate on ensuring the regional papers' economic sustainability.

Five regional papers were selected for the project: *Spektri* (Gurjaani), *Akhali Gazeti* (Kutaisi), *Gazeti Batumelebi* (Batumi), *Samkhetis Karibche* (Akhaltsikhe/Akhalkalaki), and *Khalkhis Gazeti* (Gori). By the

end of the project, another newspaper joined it, *Otsdameerte Saukune* from Tskhinvali. We tried to find as much information as possible about that paper, but despite the paucity of information, we still ventured to work with it.

The project aimed to support the regional media and improve their economic self-sustainability. A new method was developed to achieve this goal. Training courses in organizational management, marketing, general management, journalistic standards, and design and computer technologies were conducted for the selected newspapers. This yielded positive results. At present, the papers do not look bad. They have their web pages. Paata Veshapidze from *24 Saati*, Niko Nergadze from *Playboy*, Margarita Akhvediani from the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, and Thomas de Waal from the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* helped us conduct the training course. They were organizing meetings, and we achieved some success, especially in the areas of editorial policy and content development. We focused on the issue of their financial self-sustainability to increase their ability to earn sufficient revenues to maintain themselves. We have managed to achieve the 60-70% success in achieving this goal. Despite this, given the local economic situation, they still need further assistance from donors. Training was particularly intense in general management and organizational management.

Our priority was to improve the distribution network too. Here too, we encountered problems. The *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* wanted to finance the already existing distribution network or open a new agency, but this project failed and the papers had to struggle on their own, which is quite costly. They prefer to ensure growth both in retail sales and in advertising revenues. Although it is difficult to accomplish this, there is some progress.

One of our main goals was giving the papers the opportunity to enter the international arena using the *Caucasus Reporting Service*, which has permanent readership and 50,000 subscribers. Then already these journalists joined the network. Today, they already have quite a long experience of cooperation with this agency.

In terms of financial sustainability, our main asset was that editors, who worked closely and intensely with experienced people like Paata Veshapidze and Niko Nergadze, shared their experience and used it

in their work at their organization. Thus the greatest investment was made in these people, not in any specific aid.

The project envisaged infrastructural assistance as well. The papers received equipment, computers, voice recorders, still cameras, and so on. We helped them financially too. For three years, we paid out the journalists' and editors' salaries to make certain that they are highly motivated to keep working and not abandon journalistic career.

We invited many, mainly foreign, consultants from international organizations. We involved them in our work with regional papers and, from professional standpoint, our journalists learned from them. We also managed to connect the media organizations participating in the project with other donors, for example, *Samkhetis Karibche* will be receiving assistance from the Dutch organization *Press Now* for the next three years.

The donor assistance figures are falling progressively, and their consultations are increasingly subject-oriented. From 2007 to 2009, the issues of minorities and reporting on conflicts were identified as priorities. Training courses on court reform and other issues are conducted for journalists. Donors are acting this way, as they themselves explained, to avoid an upsetting balance of competition and to enable papers to regulate forms of relations among themselves in the market.

Influence of donor organizations on the independence and professional development of the media

Natia Kuprashvili – The Institute for War and Peace Reporting

We discussed the problems of professional development and editorial independence in the regional media, as well as why international donor organizations did not focus on schools of journalism. Publishing manuals or conducting training courses did not make sense because required subjects were simply not taught anywhere. The problem was the journalism schools' readiness to cooperate with civil society. Obviously, they were ready to cooperate

with international donor organizations and with the media organizations themselves. It would be good if they took advantage of this readiness – both for journalism schools and for media organizations and donors.

In connection with professional issues, I want to add that problems of journalism emerged not only because universities could not teach properly, but also because it remains a makeshift profession for journalists. Everyone can become a journalist. There were rare exceptions, when people who came from other walks of life became good journalists, but these people were sensible enough to realize the need for retraining and managed to reeducate themselves. But most of the newcomers to journalism were come-and-go people, which resulted in the current situation – mistrust of the public and poor-quality media-products. This is why it would be good if retraining courses were developed and international and donor organizations worked on this issue.

As for the international donor organizations' influence on the freedom of the media, we discussed this in detail here, and I think everyone will agree that we should not be concerned only with independence from the authorities. Independence from the business sector, owner, etc., should also be implied here. Naturally, it is much more difficult to tackle these problems and remain independent in provinces. Because there was discussion here about the project by the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, I want to note precisely this was the priority. It is much harder for both a media organization and a journalist to be independent in the province than in Tbilisi. There is one question to which I have no answer and want to hear your opinion. I realized this when I heard a conversation between a journalist and his respondent. The respondent reproved the journalist for printing someone else's comment next to his. "You know, I work for a newspaper which is funded by a donor organization, and it is unimaginable there not include the other side's comment," the journalist replied. I do not know what journalists and media organizations would do if they did not need financing from donor organizations. The answer might not be straightforward for everyone. I have an idea of what an answer might be, but I do not have a thorough answer that would explain everything. In my opinion,

donor organizations act as safeguards for media organizations and at the same time safeguard themselves. For example, you can see a notice if you open any of the newspapers that the opinions in the paper do not always coincide with the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting's* opinion. This means that they do not interfere with the content at all, but this does not prevent media organizations from being impartial and trying not to lose their grants at the same time. In this case, media organizations will always be dependent on donor organizations. In provinces, with the exception of Batumi, the media have only three options: first, to find a similar funding source, say, grants from international donor organizations; second, to strike a deal with others, and by others I mean everything that I mentioned above; and third, to close down. This is why the regional media will always need both material and intellectual “transfusions” from donor organizations.

Discussion:

David Paichadze: I want to argue why it is better to deal with a person who is yet to study journalism than with a person who is already a journalist. The existing system of journalistic education – with the exception of the Georgian Institute of Public Affairs which specializes in teaching the skills of the craft – produces journalists who are fit to work in the yellow press. The knowledge which is still imparted at universities has not been transformed to meet modern requirements. Students who received this knowledge cannot meet the requirements of the modern-day media. They neither understand modernization nor can write the news.

For the last two years, students join universities in a decent, uncorrupt way, by passing the unified admission exams. As a result of this improvement, the share of students from provinces has increased. It is impossible for all these people to stay and work in Tbilisi. They will go back to their provinces. In other words, let us seize on the opportunity and make certain that the people who joined the university, including those who want to study journalism, find modern manuals there. I mean not only translating foreign manuals, but also writing new ones. There are people in this

country who can write comprehensibly, simply and meaningfully. The material in the manuals should be entirely in Georgian, and discussions should be in Georgian too. This is one of the goals which has to be achieved, and cooperation with foreign donor and international organizations can be useful. This should become a priority because it is clear that assistance to the media has an effect of emergency care, so talking about long-term development is premature. In addition, we have to take into account that working on new manuals means long-term “investment” of resources. Writing news manuals takes years. We need to first train those who will be involved in writing them. This is why the job cannot be done quickly.

I also propose to you to start thinking about founding a nongovernmental organization which will play the role of an educator in the media sector and will be directly involved in this activity. In other words, if we talk about the role of international and donor organizations in the development of Georgia’s media sector, it is better to start developing it from the beginning, that is, from students, from the foundation, from the roots. They should be given the right direction in order to get the results.

Niko Nergadze: A manual on which IREX produced a picture story. Even those who teach and learn say that there are problems because educational materials are translated. About one third or one fourth of a book is completely incomprehensible for Georgian students.

Beka Bajelidze: We are translating an introductory-level book on journalism at present. It is written in a very simple, very witty and very professional manner. The book has interesting chapters on how to take an interview, receive information, select respondents, report on particular issues, say, the economy, conflicts, and social issues. Incidentally, it writes about ethical issues too, citing examples from different countries.

Paata Veshapidze: Journalism as it is understood by most people in Georgia has nothing to do with modern journalism. There is not

even the news culture here. I often hear the question: “Why should we write tersely?” They do not understand that this is news, a new story, this is why. Its entire value is that it is news.

Niko Nergadze: The problem of newspaper journalists is that they think that writing dryly is uninteresting. They think that they must include their opinion to make it interesting.

Paata Veshapidze: It should be interesting by merit of being news.

David Paichadze: This is why I say that, if we work on training future journalists and teach them to write in a concise, meaningful and business-like manner, without any alloy of opinion, everything will change. Granted, this will take time, but can we still not see that time has already been wasted in the last 15 years?

