

Talking points for the presentation
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MEMO 98

- **Similar to the last presentation in December 2016, I am the last person on the agenda – but similar to 2016, if you bear with me for a few minutes, you will be rewarded with some food & refreshments – so do not leave yet 😊**
- **In the meantime, I will do my best to feed you also some spiritual food for thoughts**
- **I have spent the last few weeks looking closer at the monitoring results, doing more analyzes and comparisons**
- **Above all, however, I spent this time to work more on recommendations on how things could be improved prior to the next elections – some of which we shared with you last time**
- **Given the lack of time, I prepared the full list of recommendations in writing and they will be available for you at the end of this event, but let me now share with you some of my observations and the most important recommendations.**

GPB

- **I will start with GPB which is, as some of you know, close to my heart as I spent altogether almost three months there working prior to the 2012 elections as well as in 2016. There were some discussions about my cooperation with GPB prior to the local elections, GPB was interested but unfortunately, the international donor which supported this activity in 2016 could not find enough resources to support a similar activity this time.**
- **As such, in my assessment, I rely on the monitoring conducted by the Charter, OSCE/ODIHR and other respected local organizations.**
- **When I look at the overall situation, despite some important developments after 2012, it is still politicians and not media to set the agenda**
- **Coming back to GPB, it was difficult for me to understand some**

of the changes introduced by the new management, including the closure of several programmes as well as the broadcaster's second channel that aired sessions of the parliament and national minorities-related programmes.

- Salome Asatiani's Interview program was in my view one of the best programs GPB has ever broadcast prior to any elections – it showed in-depth interviews asking hard-hitting questions to politicians, newsmakers, academics, artists and others – it showed how a modern era Georgian public service broadcaster should look like**
- And this is, in my view, what was lacking this time – critical and analytical coverage**

- When I look at private TV channels, we saw that most outlets were divided along political lines and remain under influence from their owners**
- I will repeat one of my previous recommendations - it is important to consider what is newsworthy from the viewer's perspective and not to merely satisfy the politicians.**
- In their reports, the Charter pointed out a number of examples where some of the basic ethical norms of journalism were missing – such as the lack of balance.**
- While according to the monitoring by the Charter of Journalistic Ethics, the use of hate speech was “sharply reduced compared to the previous monitoring”, some xenophobic statements were still observed. The media should refuse all open or furtive expressions of intolerance and will consider thoughtfully if publication of such expressions is not conducive to defamation and ridicule based on sex, race, color, language, faith, and religion, affiliation with national or ethnic minority or ethnic group, social difference, political or another opinion.**
- Similar to the nationwide broadcasters, regional channels should also try to provide a more comprehensive reporting of the campaign, including more in-depth materials. News should be newsworthy, informing and educating people, enriching the public discourse. As such, journalists should actively seek for**

- information and not just wait what other media outlets report to recycle their reports.¹
- **Not much to add to the well-written analysis on talk shows by the Charter – except to reiterate how important it is to have well prepared hosts who ask probing questions, presents arguments and analyze candidate’s promises – as people do not benefit so much if the discussing parties spend most of the time in arguments and mutual accusations. It would be advisable for hosts and anchors not to allow politicians to present their visions as a monolog. Instead of asking questions and inquiring about the consistency of their views, and plausibility of their promises.**
 - **Allocating equal time to talk show guests, and requesting all participants to answer same questions does not necessarily mean that election issues are covered efficiently.**

Radio

Also not much to add to a comprehensive analysis done by Internews except to also reiterate that

- **Journalists need to be more proactive rather than reactive in their coverage of elections to better facilitate the exchange of opinions and to create a platform for public debate on important issues.**
- **Journalists should be more probing in their approach when asking questions, not to let politicians come up with weak responses, excuses or general answers. They should see public money interest behind each story and confront the answers with reality.**
- **There was a general lack of exclusive stories, with journalists mainly “recycling” stories by other media outlets. It is thus important that journalists actively seek for information and do not just wait what other media outlets report.**
- **It would be advisable to focus more on regional issues and not so much on “high politics”. Consideration could be given that media,**

¹ Kuzel, Rasto and Godarsky, Ivan, *Final Narrative Report*, Council of Europe, Georgia 2012, <https://rm.coe.int/168048ba65>

in particular, the public service broadcasting sector, should enable different groups and interests in society — including linguistic, social, economic, cultural or political minorities — to express themselves.

- **Journalists can do more to reflect what is happening in the country - from either social or political perspective. As such, if there is something important happening, it should always be shown. However, it is always crucial to provide background, context and to try to confront actors (especially when holding public offices) with such contextual questions.**

Print and Online media

Civil Development Institute did a very comprehensive monitoring of print and online media. Let me also reiterate some of their recommendations

- **I believe that print and online media could do more when it comes to in-depth and analytical reporting of contestants' views and positions on different issues. They should use a greater variety of different sources to present the information from various angles necessary for proper understating of the issue at stake in a particular story or article.**
- **Online journalists could pay more attention to the appropriate attribution of all the ideas and materials they use in their work. Referencing includes the use of indicators in the text indicating where concepts and quotes came from, and a listing all the resources used to write the article. It is important to reference thoroughly and correctly to avoid instances of plagiarism. Attribution means telling the readers where the information in the story comes from, as well as who is being quoted. Attribution means using a source's full name and job title (when relevant). Information from sources can be paraphrased or quoted directly.**
- **It is important that journalists do not merely reflect positions of authorities, neither questioning official statements by officials nor properly verifying the facts. They should properly verify facts and**

criticize activities or inaction by the authorities and other official bodies.

- **In the context of Georgian elections hidden advertisement continues to represent an issue of concern. The very complex problem rests in the malpractice of advertising material that is not properly labeled as such and presented as regular editorial coverage. This practice is obviously against professional standards and journalistic ethics.** : hidden advertising in a media outlet represents a clear breach of fundamental journalistic values. It should be clearly stated that *“It is prohibited to include election campaign materials of parties (blocs), including political advertising, in informational TV and radio programs (news editions and current affairs programs). All election campaign materials must be separated from other materials and indicated as s*
- **Let me conclude my presentation on a more general note. I was privileged to observe all elections in Georgia since 2008 until today. I was there on 6 January, the day after the presidential election when Mr. Alcee Hastings, the head of international observers declared that Georgia made a triumphant step in democracy. Most of us who observed the election for more than two months did not fully agree with such a positive assessment. I was back in 2012. Alcee Hastings did not come this time but the triumphant step in democracy did - an important precedence was created in a peaceful transition of power. This is relevant for many sphere of public life, including in the media sphere. The experience from my country shows that unless there is a genuine political will, it is not possible to do a real reform of the media. Looking at the huge challenges we face in the information sphere globally, we need more than ever good quality journalism – as the best response to propaganda and disinformation and I am convinced that Georgia can be and should be an excellent regional example in this sphere.**