



GYLA is extremely concerned about suspension of political talk shows on Imedi TV

Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) is extremely concerned about the decision of Imedi TV management to temporarily suspend the segment of social and political talk shows during its fall season. As a result, two highly popular talk shows - Imedis Kvira and Reaktsia hosted by Inga Grigolia were closed down.

Management of the TV Company explained the decision by its desire to change format of existing programs and create "a brand new TV product" for 2016 season.

Producers and reporters of the said TV programs released a joint statement saying that the decision to close down the programs was rather unexpected, because the management of the TV Company had not discussed it with them. They had not been informed of anticipated changes in advance. The statement also notes that lately authorities had repeatedly expressed their disapproval about the programs and alleges that the decision is politically motivated.

Notably, while commenting on the issue representatives of the ruling coalition stated that the programs were suspended on account of intrigues and clashes about the broadcaster or its lack of objectivity.

GYLA is concerned by suspension of political talk shows on a leading channel for at least a few months, in the run-up to by-elections (scheduled in fall 2015) and one year ahead of the parliamentary elections.

In addition to the decision itself and its negative consequences on media environment in Georgia and therefore, on quality of democracy in the country, we are also

concerned by the manner in which the decision was made and publicized (reporters and public in general learned about the decision from media).

GYLA believes that operating in broadcasting sphere comes with high social responsibilities, and despite the type of ownership (private or public), a broadcaster must respect expectations of public, as suggested by a number of requirements and responsibilities established by the Georgian legislation about compliance of commercial interests with broadcasting business.

The decision to suspend two popular TV programs a few days before launch of the new broadcasting season on grounds of ambiguous plans for the next year clearly lacks credibility, and the manner in which the decision was made and publicized suggests that it was not made in best interests of the TV channel and its viewers.

Statement of the ruling coalition about the lack of objectivity of the programs as the reason for their suspension and about “same being true for other TV companies as well” is alarming. Such statements can be perceived as justification for interference with editorial independence as well as a warning against other reporters/media, which is against the principle of non-interference with freedom of media.

GYLA urges owners and the management of Imedi TV:

- exercise special caution in management of broadcasting business;
- to provide detailed explanation about reasons for suspension of the TV programs and publicize information about the process and arguments that served as the basis for making the decision;
- to carry out critical and objective reporting with the aim of promoting healthy pre-election environment;
- ensure availability of social and political programming at all times;
- respect and protect labor rights of journalists in abidance by Georgian legislation and applicable legal standards.

GYLA urges politicians and especially representatives of the ruling political force:

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- to exercise special caution when making assessments about activities of journalists and media;
- to unwaveringly abide by and respect the principles of freedom of media.