



## The systemic problem in corruption should be immediately addressed

The public has recently become aware of a number of alleged instances of corruption involving public officials. The notable examples are the public materials related to the activities of the Omega Group and TV Iberia, which are indicative of severe corruption, in which public officials may have been involved. In spite of the fact that the authenticity of the recordings has not yet been verified, it is highly concerning that the government has not responded to these materials. Moreover, some of the comments made by the representatives of the government indicate that they fail to understand the seriousness of the situation.

A number of private recordings have recently leaked to the public, which points to alleged instances of severe corruption and requests for illegal transfer of property. In one of the recordings, Zaza Okuashvili, Partner in Omega Group, talks with a representative of his competitor company (Tbilisi Tobacco). The recording depicts the discussion regarding the division of the tobacco market. The recording also contains a conversation about the transfer of 50% of the profit from the sales of the cigarettes to the Georgian Dream Fund. Another secret audio recording also contains a

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conversation where the former Minister of Sport, Levan Kipiani, is asking Zaza Okuashvili to transfer his ownership of automobiles. As the recordings show, the automobiles are intended for Levan Kipiani and other high-ranking officials. On September 24, another recording was leaked to the public, which captures the conversation between the founder of the Omega Group, Zaza Okuashvili, and Giorgi Chubunishvili (Shareholder of one of the competitor companies Tbilisi Tobacco). The recording clearly shows that 2.5 tetri is to be paid to the Georgian Dream Fund for every cigarette box sold.

Due to the importance of the case and the severity of the accusations, as well as the involvement of high-ranking officials in the case, it is important for the government to immediately address this issue and answer all respective questions. Moreover, due to the alleged systematic nature of the problem and the exposing of alleged instances of corruption in different state agencies, it is expedient to make systematic changes.

## **On the basis of materials available to us, we consider that the following steps should be taken:**

1. Investigatory agencies should commence a thorough investigation;
2. The State Audit Office should examine the potentially illegal contributions to the ruling party;
3. The Government should commence discussions about the necessity of reforms in the anti-corruption system and investigatory institutions, in order to provide for effective investigations and prevent any similar cases in the future;
4. We call on the representatives of the business sectors, who have experienced issues related to corruption with public officials and civil servants, to publicly speak about these cases, as it is the only way to protect their rights in an effective manner, including the involvement of international bodies and civil society representatives.

*Transparency International Georgia (TI-Georgia)*

*Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA)*

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*Human rights Education and Monitoring Center (EMC)*

*International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED)*

*Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI)*

*Sapari*

*Partnership for Human Rights (PHR)*

*Georgian Democracy Initiative (GDI)*

*Human Rights Center*

*Georgia's Reforms Associates*

*Open Society Foundation*