



Georgian Civil Society Addresses to the International Organizations in regard to the recent developments around Rustavi 2 TV

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Head of Europe and Central Asia team of Article 19 Sarah Clarke;

Chair of the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) Kathleen Carroll;

General Secretary of European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) Ricardo Gutiérrez;

Chair of the International Press Institute (IPI) Markus Spillmann;

General Secretary The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) Anthony Bellanger

Non-governmental organizations based in Georgia are addressing you in regard to the recent developments around Rustavi 2 TV. As you are already aware, the European Court of Human Rights rendered its judgement on the Rustavi 2 ownership dispute case on July 18, 2019. As a result of this judgement, the decision of the Georgian court system was enforced and a change was made to the ownership of Rustavi 2. Moreover, the owner appointed a new director. **As evidenced by the prior [negative experience](#) in the Georgian media landscape, the change in management/ownership has a direct effect on the change of the broadcaster's critical editorial policy towards the government. These developments pose a risk in worsening the existing media landscape in Georgia and restricting media pluralism.** A number of non-governmental organizations have [released a public statement](#) in this regard.

Rustavi 2 TV Company, which is [affiliated](#) with the opposition, is known for its critical editorial policy towards the Georgian Dream ruling party. Representatives of the Government, including the former Prime-Minister and informal ruler, [Bidzina Ivanishvili](#), have made public their [discontent](#) about Rustavi 2 and expressed their wish to see

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changes to its [editorial policy](#).

The new owner of Rustavi 2 TV made a [statement](#) claiming that there are no plans to change the editorial policy or to dismiss journalists. In spite of these promises, there is reasonable ground to believe that these statements are not convincing and have no substance. These concerns are based on the following noteworthy circumstances:

Last week, the staff of Rustavi 2 proposed to the new owner the creation of a [public board](#) that would provide safeguards for editorial independence. This board would be composed of representatives from the civil society, media experts and persons nominated by the owner. The purpose of the board was to prevent interference in the broadcaster's editorial policy and to establish safeguards, in light of the new circumstances, for the protection of the labor rights of the journalists. The new owner turned down the journalists' initiative and did not propose an alternative mechanism that would provide institutional protection. Moreover, according to a [statement](#) by the new management, the broadcaster is facing serious financial problems. There is a risk that this circumstance can be used by the new management to dismiss undesirable journalists, which would change the editorial policy of the broadcaster. Notably, while the case was still in court, the company was in an unfavourable financial situation, especially due to the asset freeze, but the management of the TV still managed to keep the broadcasting running.

We, the undersigned organizations, are calling on you to follow the developments around Rustavi 2 and thoroughly monitor all ongoing processes. It is important to preserve the broadcaster's critical editorial policy and to prevent any violations of the labor rights of journalists.

1. Transparency International Georgia
2. Georgian Young Lawyers' Association
3. Media Development Foundation

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4. International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy
5. Georgia's Reforms Associates
6. Human Rights Center
7. Society and Banks
8. Liberal Academy Tbilisi
9. In Depth Reporting and Economic analysis Center
10. Georgian Democracy Initiative
11. UN Association of Georgia
12. Sapari
13. Atlantic Council of Georgia
14. Economic Policy Research Center
15. Open Society Georgia Foundation
16. Empathy
17. Article 42
18. Institute for Development of Freedom of Information
19. Georgian Institute of politics
20. Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies