



Programs on GDS TV

From September 1, GDS TV started a series of programs in which the former Prime Minister of Georgia, Bidzina Ivanishvili, meets local journalists in all the ten regions of the country in a live broadcast. The program will be aired every Monday and Thursday before the elections.

Judging by the advance advertisement [video](#), the format of the program implies agitation in favor of the ruling party. The video shows that in the program series Bidzina Ivanishvili will be talking about “why Georgian Dream has no alternative”. The video demonstrates the sequence number and symbols of Georgian Dream. The format and content of the program clearly show that its main goal is to agitate in favor of the ruling party and, in its essence, the program does not differ from pre-election advertisements.

If the program had a formal status of a political advertisement, it would have to comply with the regulations on pre-election advertisements stipulated by Articles 50 and 51 of the Election Code according to which a pre-election advertisement may be paid or free of charge, it should have a determined airtime and indicate information

about the person ordering it, etc.

As the program does not have the official status of a pre-election advertisement, broadcasting it may qualify as services received from a legal person free of charge or at discounted prices as stipulated by Paragraph 2, Article 25 of the Organic Law of Georgia on Political Associations of Citizens, which, according to the same norm, is considered as a donation (legal persons have the right to donate up to GEL 120,000 to a political party annually). Therefore, we believe that each of the programs should be considered as a donation of the GDS TV station in favor of Georgian Dream – Democratic Georgia.

In the pre-election period, the said TV format neglects several principles of the [Code of Conduct for Broadcasters](#) approved by the Georgian National Communications Commission. Among other principles, the Code of Conduct for Broadcasters states that “During election periods, broadcasters should draw a clear line between the fulfillment of public and party functions in order to ensure impartial and balanced reporting.” This format virtually rules out balance among election contestants, because the entire program series envisages interviews with a person associated with the ruling political team. It is also noteworthy that the program often voices critical opinions and accusations towards other political actors, while the program format does not give these actors an opportunity to respond or reply to criticism.

GYLA, together with its partner organizations, called upon the State Audit Office and the Georgian National Communications Commission to study the issue.

On September 14, 2016, the Georgian National Communications Commission refused to satisfy the NGOs’ request.