

# საქართველოს ახალგაზრდა იურისტთა ასოციაცია GEORGIAN YOUNG LAWYERS' ASSOCIATION



## The Statement about Recent Developments in TV Company Maestro

We would like to voice our position about recent developments in TV Company Maestro questioning editorial independence of the channel and professional freedom of journalists, as well as violating labor rights of Maestro employees guaranteed by the legislation of Georgia.

As it became known, some leading journalists have left Maestro for the past several months. As they allege, the decision was motivated by an attempt of the owner of the

channel to interfere in the activities of the independent TV Company.

A group of 20 journalists, including Nino Tolordava, one of the news anchors and the team of comedy program [REDACTED] Pills A [REDACTED] have left the company after Nino Zhizhilashvili, senior manager and journalist in charge of newsroom was fired. Representatives of TV company, however, did not accept journalists [REDACTED] charges and link the recent developments to the reorganization process in Maestro.

Nino Zhizhilashvili says that she was going to quit anyway, when actual owner of the Maestro TV Kote Gogelia launched changes on the channel intending to remove news program [REDACTED]A from TV program. Reportedly, the program will be replaced by a new one [REDACTED] Talks A hosted by Koka Khandiashvili, PR consultant of the administration of government. Khandiashvili, though makes only general remarks on the issue. Employees of the news program, including Nino Zhizhilashvili reacted negatively on the decision and afterwards she was fired from the office by Kote Gogelia.

It is not the first high profile case of leaving Maestro TV by a journalist. In September Vakho Sanaia, a leading journalist also left the Channel. The later spoke out publicly for the first time about the reasons of his decision only yesterday, where he claimed that Maestro TV [REDACTED] management was dissatisfied with his critical programs. [REDACTED] director said that my program may lead Maestro in senior confrontation with the authorities and create problems A [REDACTED] Sanaia reported. In October, Diana Trapaidze and Teona Gogelia, co-hosts of one of the channels [REDACTED] talk-shows also quit Maestro TV. They have made the decision after meeting with Kote Gogelia. All these was preceded with Mamuka Ghlonti [REDACTED] statement made in the beginning of 2013 about launch of [REDACTED] without rules” by one of the group of government representatives against Maestro.

As former journalists of the Maestro TV allege, the actual owner of the channel Kote Gogelia intensively intervenes in editorial activities of the Channel, which contradicts editorial independence of the broadcaster and public accountability principles established by Law. We regret, that authority of the TV fails to protect their employees and can not ensure their editorial independence.

As Nino Zhizhilashvili alleged, employees of TV Company who should make decision on formation of TV program were not involved in the process, while Koka

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Khandiashvil, an unauthorized person and PR consultant of the Administration of Government of Georgia participates personally in creation of TV program. We believe that such conduct is inconsistent with the principles of freedom of journalistic activity, especially when as journalists report, owners of TV company attempt to keep good relationships with the government.

We should note that forgoing changes on TV Company Maestro have been carried out with gross violation of journalists' labor rights. These alterations and termination of labor relationships with journalists are often unexpected for them and such attitude of an employer may make adverse affect on other journalists of the channel and restrict their professional independence.

We opine that obligation to observe freedom of media and editorial independence rests on the owner and management of the Channel along with the state authorities. Accordingly, we call on relevant authorities to respect forgoing principles and to act in compliance with these principles and legislation of Georgia.

Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA)

Transparency International Georgia (TI)

International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED)

Civil Development Agency (CiDA)

Economic and Political Research Center (EPRC)