



The statement of non-governmental organizations about developments around TV 25

On February 24, 2012 the relatives of the owners of TV 25 were granted state assets worth of GEL 4 million for a symbolic price through a direct acquisition. According to the Public Registry, the same day, the owners of the TV Company sold their shares. This generated doubts about some type of a criminal agreement taken place between the shareholders, buyers of the assets and the officials who alienated the state assets at a symbolic price.

Already in the first half of 2012, the Georgian Young Lawyers Association claimed from the Court to disclose the documents regarding alienation of the state assets to the relatives of the owners of TV 25. The first instance Court did not uphold the appeal of GYLA. The documents were disclosed only after the 2012 Parliamentary elections under the decision of the Appellate Court.

In December 2012, the General Prosecutor of Georgia started an investigation regarding the state assets. The investigation commenced on the basis of the offences stipulated in Articles 332 (Abuse of Official Authority) and 194 (Legalization of Illegal Income) of the Criminal Code of Georgia. At the same time, by a reference from the Prosecutor's Office and a decision of the Court, the bank accounts of the shareholders of the "TV Channel 25" and the assets transferred to their relatives were arrested.

According to the owners of TV 25 George Surmanidze and Jemal Verdzadze, they were questioned within the investigatory process in January, 2013. As George Surmanidze and Jemal Verdzadze explained, they were summoned to the Prosecutor General's Office again on December 17, 2013. This time, no investigatory procedures were undertaken and only informal meeting took place, which lasted from 10:00 pm to 05:00 am of the next morning. During this informal meeting, George Surmanidze and

Jemal Verd zadze were placed under physiological pressure, which was conducted by around ten prosecutors, lead by a high-ranking official of Prosecutor's Office. According to George Surmanidze and Jemal Verd zadze, the pressure included verbal insults towards them and threats towards their family members. As George Surmanidze reports, the Prosecutors demanded aggressively from them a statement that would have incriminated Ivane Merabishvili and David Chkhatarashvili. If the TV Channel owners refused such a statement, the Prosecutors threatened them with an imprisonment.

The owners of TV 25 released a statement in the Georgian media regarding the pressure from the Prosecutors. As Giorgi Surmanidze explained, after the dissemination of the information in media, he was summoned to the head of the investigatory division in the General Prosecutor's Office of Georgia. The head of the investigatory division offered Giorgi Surmanidze immunity, if he refrained from disclosing the above-mentioned facts.

We would like to state the following regarding the developments around TV 25: Initiation of the investigation by the Prosecutor's Office on alienation of the state assets could have had a valid reason. However, the Georgian legislation clearly defines the obligation for law enforcement agencies to conduct the investigation with full observance of the legal requirements. Violation of this obligation by the law enforcement agencies, could, at certain cases, constitute a crime. Therefore, investigation of a crime while, at the same time, committing another crime is unjustifiable. It is important, that the accusations made by the owners of the "TV Chanel 25" are properly investigated and that it is examined whether any type of pressure or threats indeed took place against George Surmanidze and Jemal Verd zadze during the investigation process.

Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA)
Transparency International Georgia (TI)
Article 42 of the Constitution
Coalition for Media Advocacy