

საქართველოს ახალგაზრდა იურისტთა ასოციაცია GEORGIAN YOUNG LAWYERS' ASSOCIATION



The Statement concerning the Channel 9

TV Company Channel 9 launched cable broadcasting at the end of April, this year. The Channel is owned by Eka Khvedelidze, the Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili's wife (80%) and his nephew (20%). The television was established in a short period of time with well-paid journalists working there. It was well-known that the only donor of the television was the Ivanishvilis family. According to the information submitted by the National Communications' Commission, income of the television from advertisement and other sources is meager (in the period of May-August, 2012 the reported income from advertisement comprised GEL 177, 365). In view of this, from the day of its

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opening, Channel 9 was not financially stable and depended completely on its owner's funding.

Before elections, the authority of the channel released information on formation of the International Advisory Council for the television that should have ensured independence from state interference. Obviously, it was a positive step. Members of the advisory council are: Lari King, former "Talk Show" host on CNN, Less Gable - honorable president of International Relations Council, "New-York Times" international reporter, Lee Hamilton - the former congressman, Robert Menard - the French journalist. Giorgi Margvelashvili was the only Georgian member of the Council. After the elections he was appointed on the position of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia.

After elections, the newly elected Prime Minister made certain statements in terms of alienation of the Channel 9. However, the developments around the television, raises some questions. In particular, sudden resignation of Kakha Bekauri, the general director of the TV Company who, according to the circulated rumors in various media, is supposed to be nominated for the candidate of member to the National Communications' Commission. Following Bekauri's resignation, 13 journalists, including Tamar Rukhadze, head of information service, also left the company. Luba Eliashvili was appointed on the position of a director. She is Shalva Shavgulidze's wife, MP elected by majority vote from Georgian Dream; he is also deputy head in Legal Affairs Committee in the Parliament. We regret that from the day of its establishment, the International Advisory Council has not released any public statement on the developments around the Channel 9, as well as on the political bias of the Television.

We have repeatedly stated the necessity of media independence from politics. Public officials, politicians or individuals associated with them should refrain from direct or indirect interference in media activities. Information about reorganization process and other changes on the Channel 9 should be available to public. Channel 9 should ensure transparency of incomes and rights of journalists working there and editorial independence of the Company should be maximally protected.

The Prime Minister's family should discuss the models of setting boundaries between politics and mass media owned by it. Alienation of the company or implementation of **contributions that afterwards will be administered by independent team may be**

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considered as one of the ways to address the problem. As far as the international advisory board is concerned, it failed to implement undertaken obligation in terms of ensuring political independence of the Television.

International Transparency – Georgia,
Georgian Young Lawyers' Association,
International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy,
Georgian Regional Broadcasters' Association,
The Charter of Journalists Ethics