

# NO TOPHOBIA!

WEEKLY NEWSLETTER OF MEDIA DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION AND GEORGIAN DEMOCRACY INITIATIVE

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

Within the program Advancing National Integration in Georgia, implemented by the United Nations Association of Georgia, UNAG and supported by the United State Agency for International Development, USAID Media Development Foundation, MDF and Georgian Democracy Initiative, GDI implement the project *Combating Xenophobia and Discrimination in Georgia's Politics and Media*.

The goal of the project is to unite the civil sector under the idea of struggle against xenophobia and establish unified civil platform *No to Phobia*. In the aforementioned format, it will be possible to carry out effective monitoring and, if necessary, respond on every single fact of using this rhetoric, on the one hand, and to contribute to correct formation of public opinion, on the other hand.

The project also plans to assist the political unions active in Georgia create or strengthen inter-party mechanisms which will ensure that all kinds of manifestations of xenophobia and discrimination are eradicated in political activity.

Weekly newsletters will cover media monitoring findings and *No to Phobia* campaign activities. Following media outlets will be subjected to monitoring: six newspapers (Asaval-Dasavali, Rezonansi, Prime-Time, Qronika, Alia, Kviris Palitra), evening news programs and talk shows of five TV channels (Georgian Public Broadcaster, or GPB, Imedi, Rustavi 2, Kavkasia, Maestro), as well as an evening talk show of Tabula TV and Media Union Obiektivi. Monitoring will also involve online media and cover six web-portal (Saqinformi, Interpressnews, NetgazeTi, Pirveli, Reportioti, Georgia and World or Geworld.ge).

№ 1, 17-23 FEBRUARY



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## Main Findings of the Monitoring

During the period of 17-23 February the following tendencies were revealed:

- The hate speech was found directed both against foreigners and political party (mainly representatives of the National Movement) (*Asaval-Dasavali* newspaper);
- Armenophobic statements were made mainly by respondents. Media representatives made adequate reaction and explanations in only one case (Tabula TV);
- There were speculations about people being fired from their jobs because of their ethnicity, and unfounded connection of the one-sided information to potential heightening of tensions in Samtskhe-Javakheti, as well as artificial dramatization of the situation (*Saqinform* news agency);
- There were attempts to provoke anti-Turkish sentiment in political context, using pseudo-historical analysis and comparisons with the Russian occupation (Gia Burjanadze, People's Assembly);
- While in the previous research provoking anti-Western sentiment was mainly related to the protection of LGBT rights, coupled with spreading of the false facts (legalization of incest and pedophilia, etc.), during the presently reported period anti-Western discourse was also joined by the events in Ukraine. Peaceful Ukrainian activists of Maidan were labeled as "fascists" and oppressors of the ethnic Russians living in Ukraine (*Saqinform*, *Obiektivi*, *geworld.ge*, *Asaval-Dasavali*);
- There were several cases of unfounded identification of ethnicity while reporting crimes ("Interpressnews", newspapers "Rezonansi" and "Alia", GPB, "Moambe");
- Land dispute with the foreign farmers was reported without voicing the position of the farmers themselves. (*Interpressnews* news agency);
- Cases of religious discriminations were found, perpetrated by the media (Prime Time newspaper) against the Public Defender, and by the cleric representing Patriarchy (Rostom Lortkipanidze, dean) – against the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church in Georgia;
- During the reports on religious topics the dominant theme was reburial of Father Gabriel, which became the main topic of the GPS's news on 21 February and Maestro TV news on 22 February, while in the 20:00 Imedi news realization of Father Gabriel's hypothetical prophecy was presented as a confirmed fact in the journalist's editorial text;
- Discrimination by the sexual orientation came mostly from newspapers *Asaval-Dasavali*, *Prime Time*, and internet portals *geworld.ge* and *saqinform*; it included demands to legally curtail the freedom of expression for the LGBT in the context of the coming 17 May;
- Media kept active the topic of prejudices in relation to the ID cards as chips having the sign of the devil, and the relevant committee sessions;
- Political speculations were related to the role of the Church in the European integration process, as well as statements made against the representatives of the Republicans and the National Movement by both media (*Asaval-Dasavali*), and respondents (Giorgi Gugava, Labor Party; Zurab Abashidze, Georgian Dream).

## HATE SPEECH

SAQINFORM, 17 February

**REZO AMASHUKELI, poet:** "Now, when I see a person speaking foreign language, I think he is a pederast (I apologize to both you and the readers)! The West is so associated with the National Movement and these zombies that I came to hate them!.. There are several forces, which I would call one-gender people – they lean on each other to fight against this man [Irakli Garibashvili]. I promise you that if I am alive will pull by hair some people from the parliament, and some – from other parts of the Government!"

[http://saqinform.ge/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=17810:2014-02-17-07-13-30&catid=98:politics&Itemid=457#ixzz2toGzcCOI](http://saqinform.ge/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=17810:2014-02-17-07-13-30&catid=98:politics&Itemid=457#ixzz2toGzcCOI)

ASAVAL\_DASAVALI, 17-23 February

**LELIKO JAPARIDZE, opera singer:** "Who is Giorgi Baramidze? Murderer! A schmuck who deserves to be hanged by his feet in the middle of the city and be spat on by the whole people!..

Who is Givi Targamadze? A stupid creature ready to sign anything, whose head is filled with animals' excrements. I can't wait for the day when the Georgian people will give him back his words about "taking souls out".

REPORTIORI, 24 February

**IRMA INASHVILI, Founder of the Media-union "Obiektivi":** "Stay in your holes [to the National Movement members] and keep thanking God every second that a father of some raped prisoner did not meet you near your home and break your head."

<http://www.reportiori.ge/?menuid=2&id=17545>

SAQINFORM, 19 February

The ideological leader of Ukrainian neo-fascists – military criminal Mikheil Sakashvili - called from New York, on the Ukrainian TV channel 5, owned by him, the scumbags who "delight" him and "make him proud" not to give up, to continue killing and robbing people, attacking embassies and burning Kiev down – the "Euromaidan" which will forever become the Ukrainians' graveyard and the place of shame!"

[http://saqinform.ge/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=17844:2014-02-19-08-35-07&catid=98:politics&Itemid=457#ixzz2toE3kdSR](http://saqinform.ge/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=17844:2014-02-19-08-35-07&catid=98:politics&Itemid=457#ixzz2toE3kdSR)

ASAVAL\_DASAVALI, 17-23 February

**ELIZBAR JAVELIDZE, People's Assembly:** "Those who attack the Church and Georgian traditions, all must be stripped and kicked until they come to their senses".

**DATO LORTKIPANIDZE, Georgian Dream:** "Unfortunately we cannot make the Nationals shut up... Justice must be restored to such level that their information output gets shut. I want to tell these walking corpses: not everyone will have patience for such cynical actions, putting you before trial is the will of the Georgian people and it must happen."



SAQINFORM, 21 February

"Good job, Cossacks!" [headline]

"The Kuban Cossacks stopped the activity of the punk group Pussy Riot in Sochi... The soloists Nadezhda Kolokonnikova, Maria Alyokhina and their colleagues were beaten with whips and pepper-sprayed by the Cossacks."

[http://saqinform.ge/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=17896:2014-02-21-15-16-39&catid=101:ucxoeti&Itemid=385#ixzz2uueWU0xUk](http://saqinform.ge/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=17896:2014-02-21-15-16-39&catid=101:ucxoeti&Itemid=385#ixzz2uueWU0xUk)

**SAQINFORM:** "Good job, Cossacks!" "The soloists Nadezhda Kolokonnikova, Maria Alyokhina and their colleagues were beaten with whips and pepper-sprayed by the Cossacks."

## RACIST EXPRESSION



KAVKASIA, SPECTER, 19 February

**GIORGI TAVDGIRIDZE, military expert:** "We can bring 10 Negroes from Tanzania, and make them serve in the army for the money we would use on 1 Georgian, but its value will not be 1/10 as effective."

## ARMENOPHOBIA

KVIRIS PALITRA,  
17-23 February

**JEMAL CHKUASELI, artistic director of Erisioni ensemble:** "The Armenians call churchkhela [Georgian desert] "Armenian miracle", there was a case when they claimed Shota Rustaveli not to be a Georgian, and claimed samples of our national treasure to belong to other people... Not so long

ago I was on a concert in Stavropol. Abkhazs, Ossetians, Circassians, Chechens who were present there were applauding us. After the concert they told us that Georgian soul could be seen in it, our dances are still very similar... Then I asked the person who said it to repeat the same movement. He could not, of course. So I told him he could not do it because it was not part of their soul... I remember, after a concert in San-Francisco and Armenian woman gave me a disc on which it was written in English and Armenian: "Armenian national songs"... That woman knew very well that there were Georgian songs, but blatantly claimed them to be Armenian."

SAQINFORM, 19 February

"The Armenian-born Georgian fuhrer was screaming [about Mikheil Saakashvili]".  
[http://saqinform.ge/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=17844:2014-02-19-08-35-07&catid=98:politics&Itemid=457#ixzz2toF3GmSt](http://saqinform.ge/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=17844:2014-02-19-08-35-07&catid=98:politics&Itemid=457#ixzz2toF3GmSt)

TABULA, THEOREMA, 17 February

**Respondent** [Vox-pop about euthanasia]: *"No, no, that's rubbish, it's some Armenian, a real murderer"*.

The show anchor made explanations on the statement made by one of the respondents during a street poll, about ethnic origins of Doctor Jack Kevorkian who worked in Michigan, US, and was put to trial for the case of euthanasia in his medical

practice. The talk show anchor highlighted that Jack Kevorkian was American citizen and specifying his ethnic origin was irrelevant, which can be considered an example of positive reaction by the media.

**TAMAR CHERGOLEISHVILI, anchor:** "What he was doing, by the way they called him Armenian, that doctor was American, of Armenian origin, and generally Americans don't consider him Armenian, they consider him American"...

## UNJUSTIFIED PARALLELS

**SAQINFORM, 18 February**

The internet portal is spreading information received from the People's Assembly member Lasha Amirejibi, about ethnic Armenians being fired from their jobs in various municipalities of Akhalkalaki and Georgians being appointed in their places. The media portal did not check with official sources this information, which the respondent himself incorrectly connected to the heightening tensions in Samtskhe-Javakheti. The news' headline "Situation in Samtskhe-Javakheti may get tense" was based on unchecked, one-sided facts and was artificially dramatizing situation.

[http://saqinform.ge/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=17832:2014-02-18-10-18-30&catid=98:politics&Itemid=457#axzz2tnIH1TjH](http://saqinform.ge/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=17832:2014-02-18-10-18-30&catid=98:politics&Itemid=457#axzz2tnIH1TjH)

## ANTI-TURKISH SENTIMENTS

**IMEDI, REAKTSIA, 21 February**

**GIA BURJANADZE, People's Assembly:**

"Does not Turkey occupy Georgia?.. Your government [National Movement] helped Turkish expansion in Georgia. You have double standards – Russia is an occupation force, and Turkey is not?"

**OBIEKTIVI, NIGHT STUDIO, 21 February**

**GIORGI POPKHADZE, journalist:** „40 thousand passports are given to the Turks. If they are brought in... What, are not they Georgian citizens?"

## ANTI-WESTERN SENTIMENTS

**SAQINFORM, 18 February**

"The Europeans sunk in homosexuality, drugs and incest do not understand that victory of fascism [in Ukraine] will finally destroy the euro and the EU, which will be huge victory for the dollar and the US! EU can be saved from bankruptcy only by integration with the Eurasian Economic Union and the Russian ally – China, which today has been blocked by US! That's why America is staging bloody show in Ukraine today and blaming Putin..."

Yesterday, when the number of people killed by Ukrainian fascists on "Euromaidan" reached one hundred, and the number of wounded – one thousand, it became clear that the President of Georgia still is Mishtler Saakashvili, who will soon come back to Georgia and make "Euromaidan 2" here! Instead of criticizing fascism and the fascists like Israelis, the Georgian government – President, Speaker of Parliament, majority and minority parliament members – proclaimed solidarity to the so called Ukrainian opposition and criticized Ukraine's legitimate government!.. And also majority Parliament member, the well-known godless person Kordzaia [parliament member Tamar Kordzaia], who recently dirtily offended the Patriarch of Georgia Ilia II: Kordzaia, who looks at the camera with unmoving eyes... She presented the events not as the battle against Ukrainian people, but as the Putin's Russia's battle all over the world"...

[http://saqinform.ge/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=17882:2014-02-21-09-47-38&catid=115:redakciisaqan&Itemid=530#ixzz2uUDqxWP](http://saqinform.ge/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=17882:2014-02-21-09-47-38&catid=115:redakciisaqan&Itemid=530#ixzz2uUDqxWP)

**Continued on p. 6**



## ANTI-WESTERN SENTIMENTS

OBIKTIVI, NIGHT STUDIO,  
23 February

**VALER KVARATSKHELIA, anchor:** "What is happening in Ukraine is the West's conspiracy against Russia... After American scenario happens in Ukraine, Russia is threatened with: 2) Huge stream of ethnic Russian refugees from Ukraine; 4) Oppression of Russian-speaking population by violent Ukrainization; 6) Formation of terrorist training centers on Ukrainian territory that will be aimed at the Caucasus."

OBIKTIVI, NIGHT STUDIO,  
21 February

**Viewer [phoning-in]:** "My Christian brothers are oppressed... and this is America's fault. That they were going there, that musicians and scumbags, and Catherine Ashtons... Those who killed the Jews. That 50 thousand Jews that they killed and destroyed half of Poland, that people are now there and who will stop them now, you will see what terrible things will happen in Ukraine now."

ASAVAL-DASAVALI, 17-23 February

**GIORGI GIGARI, journalist:** "Why do you let foreign embassies to offend the Georgian people and cynically attack our thousand-year traditions?! Why are you silent when foreign embassies so gravely offend the souls of our future generation and even openly pay money to sponsor moral corruption?!"

**Geworld.ge:** "Now they only demand from Georgia to hold a gay parade, as one of prerequisites to sign Association Agreement, and then time will come for the second and third stages, which is legalization of pedophilia and incest..."

**Geworld.ge, 19 February**

**DAVID MKHEIDZE, journalist:** "Yes, after all since "they" (sponsors of our liberasts), who practically have finished the business of fast-track establishment of the same-sex marriages in the West, are now working (and quite successfully too) on such a "detail" as pedophilia and incest. Now they only demand from Georgia to hold a gay parade, as one of prerequisites to sign Association Agreement, and then time will come for the second and third stages, which is legalization of pedophilia and incest,

and then the devil's wheel of Sodom will start turning!..

...The courts are obviously pressured by the diplomats, who are present at all processes [trial of the clergyman Iotham Basilaia accused of the crackdown on the 17 May peaceful rally], in order to make the judge punish "the priest with a stool". "... Yes, only the Church is the patron and supporter of the Georgian people at the time of the global strengthening of LGBT!"

<http://www.geworld.ge/View.php?ArtId=5652&lang=ge>

**Geworld.ge, 20 February**

**IAKOB LEZHAVA, journalist:** "To please the West, they dare to arrest the priests (!) fighting against the sin of homosexuality and even are teaching us to criticize the Patriarch too, saying that no one is untouchable!.. Can anyone name even one success that Georgia reached with the help of the West (if we don't count as success the so called NGOs that have multiplied like mushrooms, and also the campaign these organizations are waging to discredit the Orthodox religion and establish the Sodom-Gomorrah sin (!) as a norm)!.. Our trouble is that America has masterfully handed the relay of corrupting Georgian people to Usupashvili-Alasania by the hand of Ivanishvili (whom we thought to be sent by God, and in fact is sent by America, while we were incorrectly blaming Russia)".

<http://www.geworld.ge/View.php?ArtId=5662&lang=ge>

## DISCRIMINATION ON ETHNIC GROUNDS

ASAVAL\_DASAVALI, 17-23 February

**TEIMURAZ BELIA, engineer:** "The Chinese laminate is so poisonous that even cockroach cannot hold out in it. Don't touch Armenian glue. Especially dangerous is Chinese glue... If you buy it, it is like buying death. And you must be very careful while buying Turkish glue!"

**LELIKO JAPARIDZE, opera singer:** "Who is David Kezerashvili? A worthless son of the Jewish people!"

## PROPERTY DISPUTE

INTERPRESSNEWS AGENCY,  
20 February

On 20 February *Interpressnews* agency reported on the protest rally in village Lemshveniera of Gardabani District, which was held against ownership of the local land by South African farmers. The report did not present position of the farmers who own this land, while about the land that in fact had been owned by the state before being sold to

South African investors it is said that the land "for years had been used by the village". Information also contains xenophobic statements by one of the rally participants:

**ALEXI GULBANI, Lemshveniera villager:** "Now they have brought these Boers and gave them fertile lands. We are patient people, but we are in such a need that we won't spare either Boers or Georgians who betray us."



## SPECIFYING ETHNICITY WHILE REPORTING CRIMES

The journalistic standard demands to point out the person's ethnicity while reporting crime only if the perpetrated crime is directly related to ethnic or other identity. This standard's aim is for the media not to associate any group with certain type of a crime.

During the reported period various media outlets violated this standard several times:

- On 19 February newspapers *Rezonansi* and *Alia* published the information by *Interpressnews* agency "A Georgian is arrested in Greece, blamed for murdering a priest" – Instead of specifying the suspect's citizenship, the journalist specifies his ethnicity ("24 year old Georgian arrested in Greece, suspected for murder"). Journalist is also interested in the victim's ethnicity ("the Consul does not confirm the information that the murdered priest was Georgian too").
- Public Broadcaster, Moambe, 22 February – anchor: "Ethnic Chechen questioned about the Lapankuri Operation was not let out of Georgia again" [about citizen of Georgia Saikhan Muzaev].

## DISCRIMINATION ON RELIGIOUS GROUNDS

PRIME-TIME, 17 February

**EREKLE STURUA, journalist:** "They wrote in the social networks that Ucha Nanuashvili belongs to a religious minority, this means he belongs to some unknown small sect. It is interesting that neither Nanuashvili, nor his press office responded to this information. When he was being appointed Ombudsman, Ucha Nanuashvili was directly called a sect member and the Parliament was called not to confirm his candidacy because of the Orthodox religion."

See the joint statement of MDF and GDI on this publication ("Is Ucha Nanuashvili a sect member?") on page 11-12.

ASAVAL-DASAVALI, 17-23 February

**ROSTOM LORTKIPANIDZE, dean:** "It is a big mistake to accept Armenian Church and other religions as equals to the Georgian Orthodox Church, it is a big mistake to finance them from the national budget. If three districts – Akhaltsikhe, Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda unite into one diocese tomorrow and an Armenian bishop makes his seat there, then Samtskhe-Javakheti is lost for us!"

Does the government consider these threats when it finances Armenian Church from the budget of Georgia?!"

**VALERI GELBAKHIANI, lawyer:** "Georgia and Orthodox religion are a different civilization for the West and Catholic world. God save us from Ivanishvili being a missionary of another country and another religion."

PRIME-TIME:

*"They wrote in the social networks that Ucha Nanuashvili belongs to a religious minority, this means he belongs to some unknown small sect."*

## RELIGION

The dominant religious theme was reburial of Father Gabriel, which was the main topic in the evening news of the Public Broadcaster's Moambe on 21 February and Maestro's news on 22 February, while other TV channels covered Ukrainian events and the annual address of the President of Georgia in the Parliament. Notably, Imedi TV journalists in their 21 February 20:00 news story presented realization of Father Gabriel's prophecy

not just as an opinion of believers or clergy, but as an established fact:

**IMEDI, Chronika, 22 February**  
*"What Father Gabriel prophesized before his death came true 19 years after he died."*

Notably, information portal *Reportiori* has a rubric "Religion", which mainly reports on the news related to the Patriarchy of Georgia and ignores the topic of other religions existing in Georgia.

The only topic in the media during the reported period that concerned other religious communities was published in the newspaper *Alia* (19 February) and *Pirveli* news agency (18 February). It was a report on the statement by the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality Paata Zakareishvili on financing of four additional religious communities by the state and creation of the Religions Agency.



## DISCRIMINATION ON SEXUAL GROUNDS

### PRIME-TIME, 17 February

The newspaper spreads baseless information about Executive Director of NGO *Mokalake* Giorgi Sabanadze and other employees of the Public Library, which associates them with LGBT groups in the negative context:

*"Last week an interview of Sabanadze's former colleagues was published in one of the print media outlets, in which they recollect Sabanadze's "gay" past and "blame" him for organizing LGBT "gay parade" in May of the last year... According to the Public Library's former employees' interview, after the unsuccessful "gay parade" the Li-*

*brary's director Giorgi Kekelidze and its employees Giorgi Sabanadze and Emzar Jgerenaia presented a cake with the form of a phallus to the representatives of LGBT in the so called "French hall" of the Library's 3<sup>rd</sup> Block, and ate it together with them".*

### ASAVAL-DASAVALI, 17-23 February

**DITO CHUBINIDZE, journalist:** "Is sodomy widely spread among the clergy, or what is going on?..

Several days ago the Constitutional Court of Georgia approved petition by the maniacs and gave permission to the so far "unhad" homosexuals to be blood donors, while denying such right to those who already had been "had"!... Thus, according to the decision made by the maniacs, in order to stop a homosexual from being a blood donor, they must call a proctologist who will define the issue of whether a woman-boy of suspicious behavior had been had, and say whether to accept his blood or spill it to the sewers!"

### ASAVAL-DASAVALI, 17-23 February

**GRIGOL GOGICHADZE, dean:** "Zviad [Gamsakhurdia, former President of Georgia] fought against them... A clergyman who was a sodomite and whom Mr. Zviad banished from coming to Tbilisi, is now on a high position in the Patriarchy.

**LELIKO JAPARIDZE, opera singer:** "Who is Matthew Bryza? Probably a pederast himself, who had been poisoning Georgian society with his cor-

rupt ideas for years."

Journalist **JABA KHUBUA** labels as "liberasts" human rights activist Tamar Gurchiani and anchor of Tabula TV show "Conversations about Religion" Levan Sutidze.

**GIORGI GIGARI, journalist:** "Pederast-Lesbian-Bisexual-Transsexual organization "Identoba" implements a grant program in Georgia... And it is financed by the US Ambassador in Georgia himself!.. Yes, with the

financing of American and Dutch embassies, the local pederasts and lesbians, supported by training-received and grant-received students, are preparing to perform another trouble on May 17!..

Legalization of pederasty in Georgia is happening on the Constitutional Court level already! And if the pederasts have a right to donate blood, why nobody asked the normal people whether they want to receive the pederasts' blood?!"



### ASAVAL-DASAVALI:

*"Several days ago the Constitutional Court of Georgia approved petition by the maniacs and gave permission to the so far "unhad" homosexuals to be blood donors, while denying such right to those who already had been "had"!..*



**Geworld.ge:** *"It would be good if the Parliament adopted a law which... let police put into their cars not laymen and clergy, but those who will break the law. There is time before 17 May to prohibit the LGBT activists going to streets and making public statements"...*

## DISCRIMINATION ON SEXUAL GROUNDS

Geworld.ge, 20 February

**DAVID MINDIASHVILI, journalist:** "Most of the Georgian population won't accept the LGBT rally again, and probably the same thing will happen... You know what this abbreviation means: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender. All these words are foreign, while there are proper substitutes in the Georgian language such as queer, tomboy, faggy..."

It would be good if the Parliament adopted a law which would regulate this situation and let police put into their cars not laymen and clergy, but those who will break the law. There is time before 17 May to prohibit the LGBT activists going to streets and making public statements... Then no one would have a wish to take a stool and beat someone with it, swear and abuse him, so that afterwards all of Europe calls us savages. That Europe which lived as tribes while we had a golden age, and which fate or misfortune now made our teacher and advisor... Even, Philip Dimitrov told us that we don't have to please LGBT activists in order to integrate with Europe.

...We also know that on 17 May they plan to have a presentation of a film made about Georgian LGBTs in one of the movie theaters... Advertising poster will be in front of this movie theater for several weeks and for most of the society it will be the same as a piece of red fabric before a bull during bull-fighting."

<http://www.geworld.ge/View.php?>

## SUPERSITIONS

ASAVAL-DASAVALI, 17-23 February

**GIORGI GIGAURI, journalist:** "Yes, with this free chip "cheese" Tea Tsulukiani and her agency are inviting into a mousetrap the people who don't need these devilish identity cards!"

INTERPRESSNEWS, 20 February

"Committee will consider the legal initiative from the Union of Societal-Political Organizations "In God's Name - the God is our Justice". The initiative concerns the issue of introduction of alternative identity cards. According to the initiative's authors, it is unacceptable for the absolute majority of the residents of Georgia to accept "a card with a chip" as their ID".

## POLITICAL SPECULATIONS

IMEDI, REAKTSIA, 21 February

**GIORGI GUGAVA, Labor Party:** "...[he] has brought to government the Republican Party, which is an anti-national, anti-Orthodox force."

ASAVAL-DASAVALI, 17-23 February

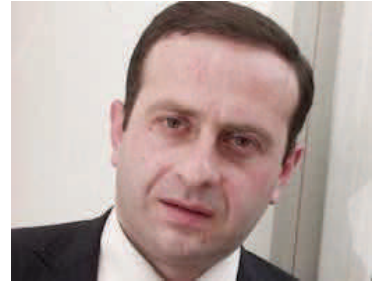
**GIORGI GIGAURI, journalist:** "Both Levan Berdzenishvili and David Zurabishvili are in fact singing Republican Party's "swan's song" from the Republican Hospital's room number 5!.. Soon the Nationals will join them and this Georgians-hating chapel will jointly sing requiem for the liberast-Sorosist forces!"

REZONANSI, 17 February

According to the statement by a representative from the Georgian Dream, Republican David Zurabishvili, Russia always used and will use in the future the Church, as its important weapon. As he said in the process of integration with the EU, the Church always was a supporter of the Russian policies.

INTERPRESSNEWS, 21 February

**ZURAB ABASHIDZE, Georgian Dream:** "When we go to foreign countries and meet our colleagues, odious representatives of the National Movement talk about the Church being the main enemy of Georgia, and about the Church supporting Russian, Kremlin's and Putin's interests in our country".



**GIORGI GUGAVA, Labor Party:** "...[he] has brought to government the Republican Party, which is an anti-national, anti-Orthodox force."

## RESPONSE

25 February, 2014

**Joint Statement of Media development Foundation, MDF, and**

**Georgian Democracy Initiative, GDI, on**

**Publication in Prime Time Newspaper**

We express our concern about the content of the article "What scandals the Public Defender is embroiled in. Is Ucha Nanuashvili a sectarian?" published by Prime Time newspaper on 17 February 2014.

Speculations offered by the author of the article about the religious belief of the Public Defender of Georgia overstep any limits of ethics and violate professional standards of journalism. Religious or any other identity of a person is a private matter of a person and belongs to the sphere of self-identification.

**Continued on p. 12**

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*Media Development Foundation, MDF is the non-governmental organization aimed at protecting fundamental rights, promoting equality and diversity; supporting professional and institutional development of Georgian media; free media environment and the establishment of media accountability system and self-regulation mechanisms.*

*Georgian Democracy Initiative, GDI is a non-governmental organization dedicated to advance country's democratic development and Euro-Atlantic integration.*

*GDI is committed to defending human rights, expanding inclusive society and promoting tolerance, strengthening democratic reforms and advancing the rule of law, enhancing transparency and accountability of public institutions.*

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## RESPONSE

25 February, 2014

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If a person does not public disclose his/her religious belief, which is the right of any individual, it is unacceptable for a journalist to discuss such private matters based on anonymous sources, even more so, when a person's religious belief is absolutely irrelevant to the story which does not cover religious issues.

The Law on Freedom of Expression protects the freedom of expression and a person's "freedom from coer-

cion, freedom to express opinions on religion, belief, conscience,... as well as all the facts that may become a ground for restriction of his rights and freedoms".

We believe that while Ucha Nanuashvili has himself never declared about his religious belief publicly – and this is his legitimate right – the discussion of this issue by a journalist and the editorial staff represents the infringement on his right. Moreover, equalizing an abstract belief of a person with a sect ("It means that he be-

long to one of unknown small sects.") is totally unacceptable and will further strengthen negative stereotypes existing among society. One should emphasize that this notion is not properly substantiated and its difference from the notion of religious organization is disputable.

We call on the editorial staff of the newspaper to refrain from manipulating with such sensitive topics and to avoid any unjustified insinuations on the religious topic.