

COOPERATION POLICY ON AUDIO-VISUAL MEDIA WITH EU STANDARDS

POLICY PAPER SUMMARY



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Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Georgian National Platform is an association of local and international non-commercial legal entities registered in Georgia, aiming to promote and implement the goals set by the Joint Declarations of the Prague, Warsaw and Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summits and the EU-Georgia Association Agreement of European Neighborhood Policy and other joint events.

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Summary

This paper analyzes the practice of cooperation in audiovisual and media fields between Georgia and the EU. The process of approximation of the national laws to Directive 2010/13/EU of the European Parliament and the Council of March 10 2010 - Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD), is reviewed. The emphasis is placed on the importance of the development and sustainability of local broadcasters and audiovisual production in the context of the EU-Georgia information security.

In this paper, the policy to switching from Russian channels to local channels through strengthening of local broadcasters, is supported. Current or future broadcasting regulation will have substantial impact on the aforementioned.

Public opinion surveys (conducted by CRRC) suggest that television broadcasting remains the main source of information in Georgia. More than 80% of the population says television is their primary source of information.

According to GNCC's data, nearly half of Georgia's population (about 47%) watches foreign channels, and 75% of those people watch foreign channels on a daily basis. These surveys show that more than 33% watches Russian channel NTV, while 22% watches ORT. Russian channels are mainly received through the open satellite platform, which cannot be affected by channel prohibition regulations. Therefore, combined with the percentage distribution, exposes the importance of supporting local broadcasting competitiveness and sustainability.

According to information from Transparency International - Georgia (TI), revenues of TV companies decreased by 33% in 2015 compared to the previous year. TI believes it was the result of amendments to the law on broadcasting, which was formally based on an approximation of the law on the audiovisual media services directive.

Taking these issues into account, this policy paper is not only methodically based on the Audiovisual Media Services Directive 2010/13/EU (AVMSD) analysis, but also on the analysis of challenges facing audiovisual media in Georgia and Europe, a study of documents (legislative basis) regulating audiovisual and media fields, approaches of media managers and representatives of organizations interested in media development, and observations on media sustainability components. The goal of this paper is to strengthen and not weaken media as an institution, and serve as a tool to fight resurgent propaganda in Georgia, as well as in Europe.

The research conducted for this policy paper revealed that the harmonization of the Georgian law with the Audiovisual Media Services Directive is carried out in a fragmented way. Not only without thorough research of the local media landscape, but also without taking into account the expected results through accelerated enforcement of certain articles.

This despite the fact that the period of implementation of the Directive expires in 2018, and certain articles in 2020.

During the process of harmonization of the Georgian law with the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) there is little communication with EC, which plans amending the AVMSD. In certain cases, the Georgian law imposes stricter regulations on broadcasters than is provided by the AVMSD, which hinders the sustainability of broadcasters and program diversity.

The EC acknowledges the necessity of revising certain AVMSD articles to ensure equal conditions for competition between media outlets (broadcast and online), including opposing hatred and inciting discord content, and propaganda.

Would audiovisual products produced in Georgia be in accordance with EU market standards and accurate use of the AVMSD, it will ensure free access of Georgian audiovisual products to the EU market.

Lack of official Georgian translations of other documents related to AVMSD, audiovisual and media, complicates the process of harmonizing domestic law with EU law.

This paper proposes ten recommendations to solve the current problems, summarized in the following two major recommendations:

- Take efforts, by the Government of Georgia together with the European countries, to develop the local audiovisual field and improve competition among local broadcasters.
- Alleviate the tax regulations for producers of audiovisual products, e.g. exempt them from profit and/or income tax.

This will be one of the most effective ways to fight foreign propaganda and ensure information security of European countries.

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