

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/georgia-opposition-tv-channels-finally-get-09-07-2012,42986.html>

Europe/Ex-USSR - Georgia

A tentative step

## Opposition TV channels finally get airing on cable — for 60 days

9 July 2012

Reporters Without Borders welcomes as a first step the approval by Georgia's Parliament on 29 June of an amendment to the electoral code obliging all cable networks to carry all television channels for a 60-day period in the run-up to an election.

"We acknowledge this decision by Parliament, which will temporarily extend the coverage of opposition stations at national level," the press freedom organization said.

"On the plus side, it will encourage pluralism and will finally give subscribers a more representative choice of programming. However, we strongly deplore the fact that this provision is for a limited duration. We fear that, once the pre-election period is over, opposition stations will once again be subjected to pressure and boycotts.

"The amendment as formulated by members of Parliament offers them no long-term guarantee of protection against censorship. In such a polarized media environment, it is essential that action be taken to guarantee pluralism of opinion in the broadcast sector."

As the October election approaches, 103 of Georgia's 150 members of Parliament agreed to modify the electoral code by introducing this amendment known, as "must-carry". Inspired by similar legislation in the United States, from which it gets its name, it legally obliges cable providers to include in their packages all channels with an audience share of more than 20 percent.

This will allow more than 170,000 subscribers to access for approximately two months three of the country's opposition stations normally only available via satellite. These are *Channel 9*, co-owned by the wife of the leader of the opposition Georgian Dream party, Bidzina Ivanishvili, as well as *Maestro TV* and *Kavkasia TV*.

Normally, *Maestro TV* is not part of the programming package offered by the two biggest cable providers, Silk TV and Caucasus TV. As regards *Channel 9*, all providers had refused to carry it except Global TV, which is owned by Alexander Ivanishvili, the brother of Bidzina Ivanishvili.



The amendment is aimed at ending a long-standing controversy involving Global TV. Since March this year, pro-government channels have been exerting strong pressure on tens of thousands of viewers against Global TV's plan to carry *Channel 9* programmes.

The managements of *Rustavi 2 TV* and *Imedi TV* threatened in writing to withdraw from the package unless Global TV gave up its intention to include the opposition station.

Furthermore, tens of thousands of satellite dishes belonging to Global TV were seized by the authorities on June 22 in a series of raids on warehouses. The public prosecutor who

ordered the move ruled that the free distribution of dishes by Global TV just months before an election could be construed as vote buying.

An investigation was also launched into the leader of the opposition for illegal vote buying. Under the penal code, such an offence is punishable by a heavy fine or a prison term of between one and three years.

After Parliament approved the must-carry amendment, the opposition had hoped to extend the time that it remains in effect to 80 days, i.e. throughout the campaign and ending with the announcement of the election results. However, Parliament did not take this request into account.

Figures from the National Telecommunications Commission show the number of cable subscribers rose from 135,369 at the start of 2011 to 171,641 by the end of the year. Three companies share most of the cable market — Silknet, with 43,027 subscribers at the end of 2011, Super TV with 37,936 and GNN with 19,140. There are about 70 providers for the country as a whole, concentrated mainly in the main towns and cities.

Georgia is ranked 105th of 179 countries listed in the latest World Press Freedom Index compiled by Reporters Without Borders.

Photo : <http://pik.tv/en/news/>

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#### Other images



JPEG - 10.4 kb  
300 x 216 pixels

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