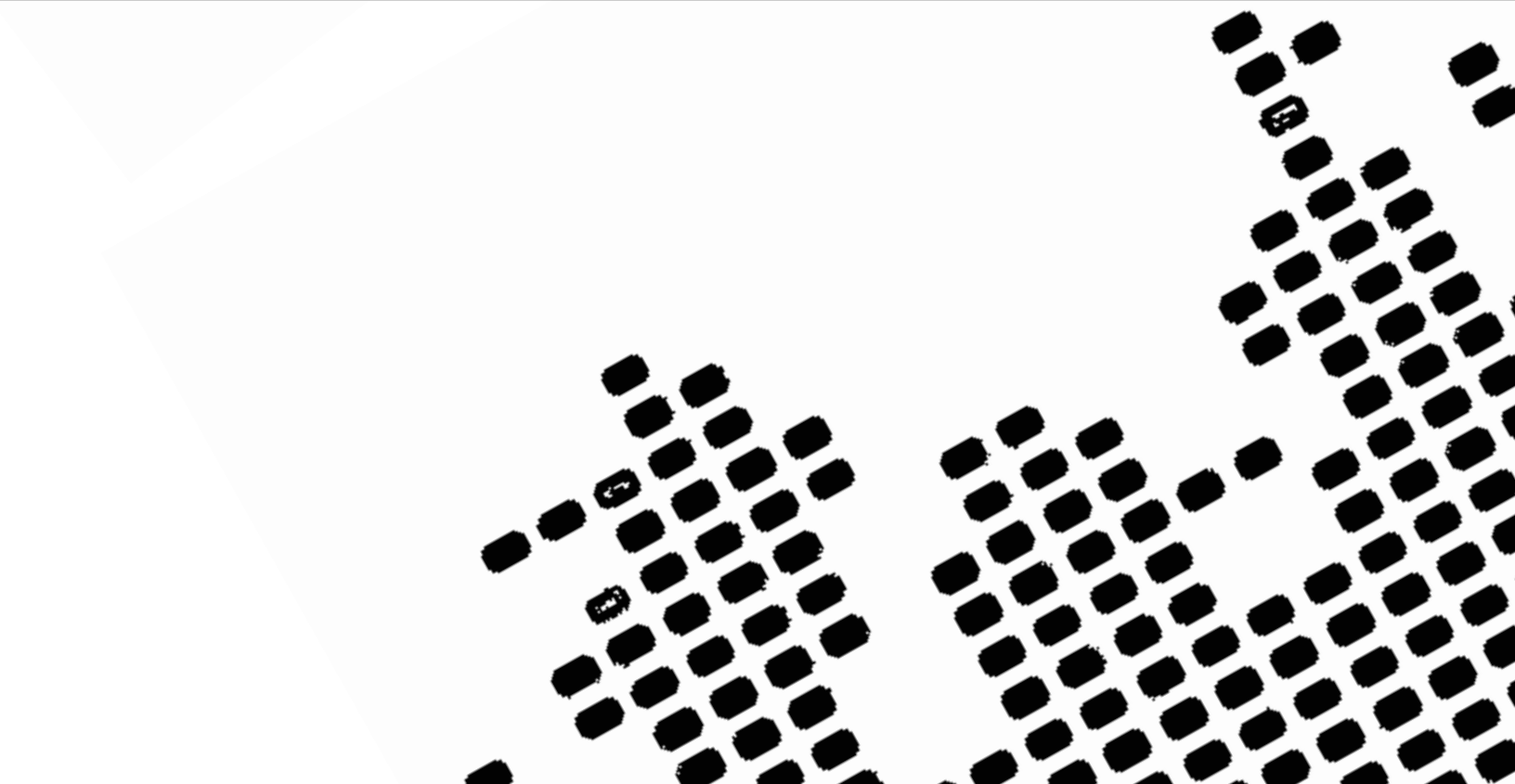
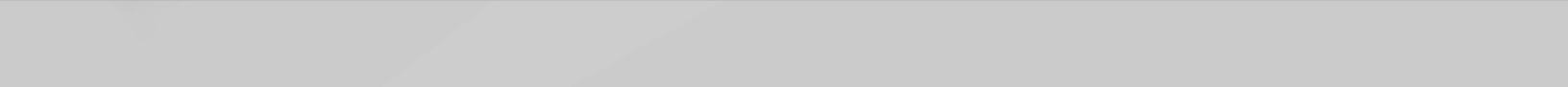




MEDIA ENVIRONMENT IN GEORGIA, 2025-2026



## Human Rights Center (HRC)



Human Rights Center (HRC) was established on December 10, 1996, in Tbilisi. The objectives of HRC are to strengthen the respect for human rights, and fundamental freedoms and to promote peace processes in Georgia. To achieve the above objectives, it is of utmost importance that the awareness of the public is raised, and human rights are observed, further the government respects the rule of law and principles of transparency and distribution of power and ensures the elimination of discrimination at all levels.

HRC IS A MEMBER OF THE FOLLOWING INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS:

- International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH); [www.fidh.org](http://www.fidh.org)
- World Organization Against Torture (OMCT - SOS Network - Torture); [www.omct.org](http://www.omct.org)
- Human Rights House Network [www.humanrightshouse.org](http://www.humanrightshouse.org)
- Coalition of NGOs for the International Criminal Court (CICC); [www.coalitionfortheicc.org](http://www.coalitionfortheicc.org)

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## Introduction and Methodology

The Report below reviews the media environment in Georgia in 2025–2026<sup>1</sup> and evaluates the main trends and challenges affecting media rights, journalists’ safety, and the environment for disseminating information.

In recent years, the media environment in Georgia has been undergoing a process of radical changes. In particular, working conditions for the media have changed significantly following the political developments and protest demonstrations that started at the end of 2024. This period has been characterized by tightening of legal regulations, an increase in physical and administrative pressure on journalists, as well as by the intensification of practices of discrediting the media.

The Report relies on the research reports published by domestic and international organizations, articles and other relevant information available in the media, which reflect the state of media freedom, legal framework and state of journalists’ rights in Georgia.

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<sup>1</sup> For the year 2026, the report covers only the four-month period including April.

## Key Findings

The comprehensive analysis of the 2025–2026 reporting period demonstrates that the media environment in Georgia is at a stage of fundamental and radical transformation. Independent media has shifted into survival mode. The findings indicate that the media environment is no longer merely “challenging,” but has become openly hostile, requiring an appropriate response from both local and international actors.

**Institutionalization of legislative repressions** – instrumentalization of the repressive legislation has become a significant challenge for the media environment. In recent years, dozens of new laws and amendments in existing laws have been adopted, which have substantially worsened the rights and working environment of the media.

**Encouraged violence and impunity** – more than 300 incidents recorded in 2025, affecting 323 journalists, confirm that attacks against the media are systemic in nature, while the failure of state institutions to investigate these cases encourages a culture of impunity, creating a dangerous working environment for media representatives.

**Criminalization of professional activities** – case of Mzia Amaglobeli and arrests of journalists indicates the use of politically motivated justice against the media. Expression of critical views and covering public protests are increasingly becoming grounds for administrative or criminal prosecution against journalists.

**Closure of judiciary system** – closure of court hearings to the media has made public oversight of the justice process impossible and deprives the media of its role of “public watchdog”.

**Paralyzing media operation** – repressive legislation placed independent media organizations on the verge of collapse. It is not only the bureaucratic restrictions, but rather a purposeful strategy to stop media activities.

**Targeted disinformation campaign** – permanent discrediting of independent media aims to destroy public trust towards them and silence the sources of trustworthy information for the society. Such campaigns disregard media and individual journalists, manipulate public opinion and encourage or justify physical or legal assaults that create fertile ground for repression.

**Self-censorship** – repressive and vague legal norms, together with an environment of systemic violence and intimidation contributes to the rise of self-censorship. Such a reality, with “chilling effect” of self-censorship, creates fertile ground to abolish healthy public discourse and to manipulate public opinion.

**Administrative barriers and unlawful interference** - in parallel with physical aggression, widespread practice of unlawful interference in the professional activities has been documented: seizure of equipment, prohibition of filming in public space and public insults directed at media representatives from the side of high-ranking officials.

**Violation of the best international standards** - Assessments by international organizations confirm that the deterioration of media freedom in Georgia is part of a broader democratic backsliding. Institutional violence and the politicization of regulatory mechanisms are pushing the country toward international isolation.

## Repressive Legislation and Institutional Environment

The state of media freedom in Georgia is characterized by a sharply deteriorating tendency, which is reflected both in increased pressure on journalists and in the tightening of the legislative and institutional environment. These processes demonstrate a systemic rise in risks for media activity and narrowing the space for critical journalism<sup>2</sup>. In accordance with the *Center for Media, Information and Social Research (CMIS)*, 375 incidents targeting journalists were recorded only in 2025, which affected 323 journalists. At the same time, the number of incidents registered against media in 2024–2025 reached approximately 600, which indicates the intense nature of the problem<sup>3</sup>. The most widespread forms of coercion are physical violence, insults, intimidation, administrative sanctions, including financial penalties – particularly for covering protest demonstrations; as well as smear campaigns and the use of legal mechanisms to restrict journalistic activities. In 2025, 20 instances of journalists being detained and arrested were recorded, including during the performance of their professional duties<sup>4</sup>.

State institutions, including law enforcement agencies, are involved in a significant part of media rights violations, which raises concerns about the accountability of state actors and the risk of abuse of power by them.<sup>5</sup>

The impact of legislative amendments is not limited only to direct regulations. They create so-called “chilling effect”, when journalists and media organizations tend towards self-censorship to avoid legal risks. This affect is particularly pronounced in conditions, where the legal norms are broadly and inconsistently interpreted that increases the possibility of their selective application.<sup>6</sup>

The repressive legislative framework substantially changed the working environment for media and civil society. The regulations formally aiming to ensure transparency, in

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<sup>2</sup> Media, Information and Social Research Centre (CMIS), *Safety Challenges Facing Independent Media in Georgia* (2025); Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR), *Summit Report* (2025).

<sup>3</sup> CMIS (n 1); Reporters Without Borders (RSF), *Unprecedented Crackdown in Georgia: 600 Attacks Against the Press in One Year* (2025).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> European Commission, *Communication on EU Enlargement Policy COM* (2025); European Commission, *Staff Working Document SWD* (2025).

practice, have become the instruments of stigmatization and oppression. Vague clarifications in the legislation and disproportionate sanctions reduce the abilities of media to fully carry out their professional duties.<sup>7</sup>

It is also worth noting the repressive policy of the now-abolished Anti-Corruption Bureau directed against the media and non-governmental organizations. The Bureau requested several independent media outlets, including “Project 64,” “Mtis Ambebi,” “Realpolitika,” and “iFact,” as well as the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics, to provide detailed information on active or signed grant agreements. The letters did not specify the legal basis for these requests, which led to justified criticism. These actions are regarded as part of increasing administrative pressure on independent media.<sup>8</sup>

In response to critical worsening of the media environment in Georgia, *Reporters without Borders* (RSF) in its 2025 annual report placed the founder of the Georgian Dream and former Prime Minister of Georgia Bidzina Ivanishvili on the list of 34 “Press Freedom Predators.”<sup>9</sup> The list was published to mark the International Day against Impunity for the Crimes Committed against Journalists. On the list of the Press Freedom Predators, Bidzina Ivanishvili is placed alongside such individuals like: Vladimir Putin, Aliaksandr Lukashenka, Ali Khamenei, Nicolas Maduro, etc. According to the RFS, the main source of Ivanishvili’s influence is his wide business network, which is considered to be a significant leverage.

According to the same Reporters without Borders (RFS), in 2026, Georgia dropped by 21 positions in the Press Freedom Index compared to the previous year. Overall, in recent years, the country has fallen back by 75 positions in the same index.<sup>10</sup>

## Amendments to the Grants Law of Georgia

Amendments to the Grants Law had a significant impact on the working environment of the media in Georgia<sup>11</sup>. These amendments created additional obstructions for those

<sup>7</sup> Media, Information and Social Research Centre (CMIS), *Safety Challenges Facing Independent Media in Georgia* (2025); Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR), *Summit Report* (2025).

<sup>8</sup> Media Advocacy Coalition, “Request for detailed information about grant agreements from online media outlets is politically motivated,” 2025.

<sup>9</sup> Reporter Without Borders, 2025 Press Freedom Predators.

<sup>10</sup> Reporter without Borders, 2026 RSF Index: press freedom at a 25-year low, 2026; Netgazeti, In recent years, Georgia fell back by 75 positions in Media Freedom Index, April 30, 2026.

<sup>11</sup> Civil.ge: Disputed parliament adopted next amendments to the Grants Law, April 15, 2026

media outlets, which depend on the independent international support. The financial environment of media in Georgia is generally characterized by weak economic sustainability. The limited advertising market and its concentration increase the dependence of media on limited financial resources.<sup>12</sup>

After the report of the Universal Periodic Review of the United Nations (UPR), the tightening of the Grants Law is linked to challenges affecting the sustainability of independent media. Restrictions on support received from international organizations reduce the operational capacity of media organizations and increase their vulnerability.<sup>13</sup>

These conditions create an environment in which media outlets may be forced, in order to survive, to limit their critical editorial policies, which negatively affects media pluralism and its democratic function.<sup>14</sup>

### **FARA and the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence**

The legislative initiatives adopted for the purpose of regulating the foreign influence in the country are strong instruments to restrict the activities of the media and civil society. This normative framework affects the work of both the organizations and individual journalists and create additional legal and institutional risks.

According to the assessment of the Venice Commission, the Law on the Registration of Foreign Agents (GEOFARA) unjustifiably expands restrictions and requires any person acting on the “instructions” of a foreign power to register as an “agent of foreign principle.” For the media, this means mandatory labeling of content, which fosters distrust within society. Particularly alarming is the criminal liability provided for under this law. Even in cases of minor technical violations, journalists and media managers may face prison sentences of several years.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> European Commission, *Staff Working Document SWD* (2025), Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2026: The Growing Shadow of Autocracy* (2026).

<sup>13</sup> UN Human Rights Council, *Universal Periodic Review: Joint Submission by Media Advocacy Coalition and Committee to Protect Journalists* (2025).

<sup>14</sup> European Commission, *Staff Working Document SWD* (2025).

<sup>15</sup> Venice Commission, *Opinion on the Law on Foreign Influence Transparency (GEOFARA)* CDL-AD(2025)034-e (2025).

The Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence obliges the media outlets (broadcasters, printed and online media), which get more than 20% of their annual income from abroad, to get registered as “an organization implementing the interests of foreign principal.” According to the Venice Commission, it stigmatizes independent media, degrades their reputation and undermines their functioning. Strict administrative penalties and permanent monitoring create a “chilling effect”, which silences dissent voices and restricts freedom of expression.<sup>16</sup>

In accordance with the assessment of the Venice Commission, these laws create a repressive system, which aims to control and silence civil society and independent media rather than to ensure transparency. Because of procedural miscarriages, vague terms and disproportionate penalties in them, the Commission recommended that they be annulled.<sup>17</sup>

### **Amendments in the Laws on Broadcasting and Freedom of Speech**

Amendments made to the Laws on Broadcasting and Freedom of Speech increase the potential for regulatory influence over the media space and create additional challenges for independent media outlets. The changes to the Law on Broadcasting, which entered into force in April 2025, among others include a direct ban on broadcasters to receive funding from a “foreign power,” with limited exceptions for commercial advertising and sponsorship. This ban is particularly problematic for media organizations that depend on international support. In addition, the content regulations provided under the broadcasting law increase the risk of editorial interference.<sup>18</sup>

According to the assessment of the Venice Commission, a complete prohibition of foreign financing, under conditions of a limited and concentrated advertising market, effectively limits the viability of independent broadcasters and has a negative impact on media pluralism. The Venice Commission also noted that when the State determines permissible sources for media funding, it indirectly influences independence, which contradicts the European standards of freedom of expression.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Venice Commission, *Opinion on the Law on Foreign Influence Transparency (GEOFARA)* CDL-AD(2025)034-e (2025).

<sup>17</sup> Venice Commission, *Opinion on the Law on Foreign Influence Transparency (GEOFARA)* CDL-AD(2025)034-e (2025).

<sup>18</sup> SJC, „*Amendments Initiated in the Law on Broadcasting undermines the freedom of media and expression*, (2025).

<sup>19</sup> Venice Commission, CDL-AD(2025)034-e (2025).

Granting broad sanctioning powers to the Communications Commission creates an environment in which editorial judgment may become grounds for administrative penalties. This is particularly problematic when the terms used are not sufficiently clear or legally predictable.<sup>20</sup>

The amendments introduced into the Law on Freedom of Speech and Expression in 2025, create a qualitatively new, stricter legal framework, which significantly changes the practice of expression both for media and individuals. Removing a component of harm from the definition of the defamation reduces the standard, which was necessary to lawfully punish the statement. Such formulation – “a substantially false and defamatory statement” – creates grounds for wider interpretation and increases the risk of subjective assessment. In addition to that, shifting the burden of proof to the defendant substantially alters the procedural balance. This amendment, in practice, may encourage self-censorship, particularly in the environment, where information sources are limited or closed. Widening the mechanism to compensate for the harm further intensifies the potential of being sanctioned. If the court concludes that either rejection or correction is not enough, imposing additional financial responsibilities create a significant economic burden for the media and individuals. This environment is particularly problematic for small and independent media, whose resources are limited and are more vulnerable for lengthy court disputes.<sup>21</sup>

Elimination of protective mechanisms introduced by the amendments, including practical guarantees for the protection of source confidentiality, weakens one of the fundamental principles of journalistic activity. The use of refusal to disclose sources against the defendant creates a real threat to investigative journalism, where information gathering often relies on confidential communication. Similarly, the abolition of “qualified privilege” deprives the media of legal protection that recognized good-faith action and the primacy of public interest, even when factual errors were present. The introduction of substantive regulation through the concept of “insult in the public sphere” expands the scope of state intervention. Such an expansion increases the risk that critical or strong assessments, which are considered normal in democratic discourse, may

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<sup>20</sup> OSCE, *Fact-Finding Mission on Georgia under the Moscow Mechanism* (2026).

<sup>21</sup> CMIS, *Next legislative amendments of the Georgian Dream against the freedom of speech and expression*, 2025.

become the subject of legal disputes. Strengthening the priority of privacy protection, in parallel with the removal of relevant balancing provisions, changes the balance between public interest and confidentiality. The new reality increases the likelihood that privacy arguments will be used to restrict the dissemination of information, which directly affects the level of accountability and transparency.<sup>22</sup>

A combination of these changes creates an environment in which legal risks are significantly increased, protective mechanisms are reduced, and the scope of regulation is expanded. As a result, the functioning of the media and civic space becomes increasingly dependent on self-restraint, which negatively affects the quality of public discourse and democratic processes.<sup>23</sup>

## Physical Violence and Security Risks

In 2025-2026, physical violence became a systemic and increasing problem in the media environment of Georgia. The available data demonstrates that journalists are under the threat particularly while covering protest demonstrations and public assemblies, where their direct contact with law enforcement forces and supporters of the Georgian Dream increases the risk of violence.<sup>24</sup>

The recorded incidents often include physical violence, as well as detention and other forms of coercion against journalists. In 2025, numerous cases of detention and arrest of journalists were recorded; among them were at least 20 cases, which indicated an alarming trend, when journalists may become targets of law enforcement officers while performing their professional duties.<sup>25</sup>

During the protest demonstrations, the violence used against the journalists was disproportionate and, in some cases, deliberate, aimed at obstructing the documentation

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Media, Information and Social Research Centre (CMIS), *Safety Challenges Facing Independent Media in Georgia* (2025); European Commission, *Staff Working Document SWD* (2025).

<sup>25</sup> CMIS, *Journalists' Detentions in Georgia 2024–2025* (2026).

of events.<sup>26</sup> The reports of special monitoring also prove this information, which underlines that verbal and physical violence against journalists had a systemic character.<sup>27</sup>

Significant part of the violent facts were recorded in the capital and other politically active cities, where political process and protest activities are more intense. In some cases, signs of ill-treatment were observed during the detention, which further escalated the state of safety of journalists.<sup>28</sup>

Cases of journalists being detained and subjected to administrative imprisonment have acquired clearly systemic character. According to documented data, majority of cases are linked to large-scale protest demonstrations, including rallies against the so-called Russian law, post-parliamentary election protests, and pro-European demonstrations.<sup>29</sup> Law enforcement officers do not always take the professional status of journalists into account and disregard their obligation to protect them.<sup>30</sup>

A considerable part of the detentions is based on administrative offenses, particularly charges are related to disobeying the police and blocking roads. In a few cases, the use of administrative detention and fines raises concerns about selective enforcement, especially when the context of professional journalistic activity is evident.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to physical threats, journalists also face challenges related to digital security, including online harassment, coordinated discrediting campaigns, and the dissemination of personal data, all of which create additional psychological pressure.<sup>32</sup>

All in all, the practice of detention and arrest of journalists in Georgia indicates a systemic tendency, where legal and administrative mechanisms are applied in combination to restrict the professional activities of the media. It weakens the role of the media as an

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<sup>26</sup> Reporters without Borders (RSF), *Unprecedented Crackdown in Georgia: 600 Attacks Against the Press in One Year* (2025).

<sup>27</sup> Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR), *Summit Report* (2025).

<sup>28</sup> Media, Information and Social Research Centre (CMIS), *Safety Challenges Facing Independent Media in Georgia* (2025); European Commission, *Staff Working Document SWD* (2025).

<sup>29</sup> CMIS, *Journalists' Detentions in Georgia 2024–2025* (2026); UN Human Rights Council, *UPR Joint Submission on Media Freedom* (2025); Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2026: The Growing Shadow of Autocracy* (2026).

<sup>30</sup> CMIS, *Journalists' Detentions in Georgia 2024–2025* (2026); UN Human Rights Council, *UPR Joint Submission on Media Freedom* (2025); Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2026: The Growing Shadow of Autocracy* (2026).

<sup>31</sup> Media, Information and Social Research Centre (CMIS), *Safety Challenges Facing Independent Media in Georgia* (2025); European Commission, *Staff Working Document SWD* (2025).

<sup>32</sup> CMIS, *Safety Challenges Facing Independent Media in Georgia* (2025); European Commission, *Staff Working Document SWD* (2025).

instrument of public oversight and restricts the right of society to get comprehensive information about ongoing developments.<sup>33</sup>

## Unlawful Interference with Professional Duties

Unlawful interference with professional duties remains a systemic problem and poses a significant challenge to media freedom. Journalists are frequently restricted in their movement, obstructed while filming, or denied the opportunity to work in areas where events of public interest are taking place.<sup>34</sup> Such practice substantially reduces the capacity of media to ensure full and impartial covering of events.<sup>35</sup> The legal and physical barriers applied against the media weaken its role as a “watchdog of the government,” which constitutes one of the fundamental elements of a democratic system. This circumstance is directly linked to the effectiveness of democratic institutions and the quality of accountability.<sup>36</sup>

The problem is further aggravated by systemic obstacles in the access to the information. Public institutions often fail to provide complete and timely responses to journalistic requests, thereby violating obligations established by law. The withholding or delay of information significantly restricts the possibilities for investigative journalism and reduces the access to public information.<sup>37</sup>

Cases of damaging the equipment of journalists and threats against them were recorded, which creates a hostile environment for media representatives.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> CMIS, *Safety Challenges Facing Independent Media in Georgia* (2025); European Commission, *Staff Working Document SWD* (2025).

<sup>34</sup> CMIS, *Safety Challenges Facing Independent Media in Georgia* (2025); Reporters without Borders (RSF), *Unprecedented Crackdown in Georgia: 600 Attacks against the Press in One Year* (2025).

<sup>35</sup> MFRR Summit, *Report* (2025).

<sup>36</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2026: The Growing Shadow of Autocracy* (2026).

<sup>37</sup> European Commission, *SWD* (2025).

<sup>38</sup> CMIS, *Covering court proceedings: Obstructions for journalists* (2026).

## Threats, Insults

The practice of threats and verbal abuse against media representatives remains a significant challenge and is acquiring a systemic character. These actions are often accompanied by other types of violations and create an environment in which journalists are subjected to both direct and indirect pressure. Aggressive rhetoric, including public statements and discrediting attempts spread across various platforms, significantly worsens the conditions for media work and lowers professional safety standards.<sup>39</sup>

The widespread practice of threats and insults has a negative impact on public views and encourages shaping a negative attitude towards journalists. As a result, psychological oppression on media representatives increases and self-censorship strengthens that directly impacts the quality of media freedom and restricts the capacities of critical and investigative journalism.<sup>40</sup>

Threats and insults manifest in various forms, including coordinated online campaigns, public statements and personal communications. This practice not only harms individual journalists but also weakens the media sector, as it creates a sense of fear and insecurity that affects free dissemination of information.<sup>41</sup>

These tendencies demonstrate that threats and insults of media representatives are not isolated incidents, but part of the widespread problem, which is linked to the backsliding of democratic environment and restriction of media freedom. In such conditions, it is particularly important to have mechanisms of effective response to ensure safety of journalists and to enable them to perform their professional duties freely.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> CMIS, *Safety Challenges Facing Independent Media in Georgia* (2025); Reporters without Borders (RSF), *Unprecedented Crackdown in Georgia: 600 Attacks against the Press in One Year* (2025).

<sup>40</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2026: The Growing Shadow of Autocracy* (2026).

<sup>41</sup> CMIS, *Safety Challenges Facing Independent Media in Georgia* (2025); Reporters without Borders (RSF), *Unprecedented Crackdown in Georgia: 600 Attacks against the Press in One Year* (2025).

<sup>42</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2026: The Growing Shadow of Autocracy* (2026).

## Fines for the Performance of Professional Duties

Administrative sanctions, particularly fines, have become one of the key instruments to oppress media representatives. A significant portion of the observed cases are related to the coverage of protest demonstrations, when journalists are charged for the activities like artificial blocking of the road, although they were performing their professional duties on the site. This practice indicates that the legal mechanisms are used to restrict the professional activities of journalists.<sup>43</sup>

Financial sanctions have become an additional burden for media representatives and further complicate the already difficult environment. It has a negative impact on media freedom and increases the risk of self-censorship, which affects the quality of media freedom.<sup>44</sup>

The protest demonstrations held after the parliamentary elections of October 26, 2024, significantly changed the environment for media functioning. In this period, the law enforcement practice became particularly notable, manifesting in the intensive use of administrative measures against media representatives. Cases of journalists being fined and detained on the grounds of ‘artificially blocking the road’ and ‘standing on the pavement’ have acquired a systemic character.<sup>45</sup>

According to public data, 40 cases of fining media representatives for ‘artificially blocking the road’ were recorded, which affected 30 journalists. There were instances when one and the same journalists were fined several times. Particularly notable is that big portion of fines were issued when journalists were performing their professional duties – filing the protest demonstrations or working on reportages.<sup>46</sup>

Legislative amendments significantly tightened the legal framework. Administrative fine for ‘illegal blocking of the road’ was increased up to 5 000 GEL and since October 2025, it has become possible to use administrative imprisonment for the same action. Later, the

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<sup>43</sup> CMIS, *Safety Challenges Facing Independent Media in Georgia* (2025); Reporters without Borders (RSF), *Unprecedented Crackdown in Georgia: 600 Attacks against the Press in One Year* (2025).

<sup>44</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2026: The Growing Shadow of Autocracy* (2026).

<sup>45</sup> CMIS, *Fining media representatives* (2026).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid

same liability was applied for standing on the pavements that considerably increased legal risks for journalists.<sup>47</sup>

The practice revealed that the law enforcement bodies deliberately sanction media. Although quite frequently the court annuls the fines or drops court proceedings, the established practice obviously aims to intimidate media representatives.<sup>48</sup>

## Uninvestigated Cases

A significant part of the violations committed against media in 2025-2026 remain without adequate and effective response that creates systemic problem of impunity. Ineffective investigation of the cases of violence, threats and interference in professional duties reduces the effectiveness of legal protection mechanisms and reinforces the perception that such actions are not adequately punished.<sup>49</sup> Such an environment of impunity encourages repeated violations and creates systemic challenges. Culture of impunity is particularly obvious in the cases which are related to a politically sensitive context.<sup>50</sup>

In the document published by the CoE Human Rights Commissioner, lack of liabilities for the violent dispersal of the protest demonstrations in 2024 and at the beginning of 2025 is one of the central topics discussed. Despite existing accusations, there have been no legal responses against those individuals, who were responsible for the excessive use of force by law enforcement officers and unlawful actions against journalists. These circumstances directly affect the media performance: impunity environment increases the level of professional risks for journalists, especially when they cover mass assemblies. In this context, the case *Tsaava and Others v. Georgia* underlines the obligation of the state to ensure that public assemblies are managed in accordance with the human rights standards in full compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights. Failure to

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

<sup>49</sup> CMIS, *Safety Challenges Facing Independent Media in Georgia* (2025); Reporters without Borders (RSF), *Unprecedented Crackdown in Georgia: 600 Attacks against the Press in One Year* (2025).

<sup>50</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2026: The Growing Shadow of Autocracy* (2026).

implement this obligation creates an environment where media representatives are forced to work in conditions of self-censorship.<sup>51</sup>

## Closed Court Trials

Lack of transparency of court hearings remains to be a significant challenge for media and is considered to be a grave form of professional obstruction. It deprives journalists of the possibility to provide the society with comprehensive information about the judiciary process.<sup>52</sup> In such conditions, court proceedings less likely become subjects of public oversight that contradicts fundamental principles of the democratic governance and reduces legitimacy of judicial system.<sup>53</sup>

In accordance with the amendments adopted in June 2025, photo, video and audio recording was, in fact, prohibited in the court room, court buildings and yards. As a result, media was left beyond visual and audio documenting process that is particularly problematic in relation with high profile courtcases.<sup>54</sup>

## Political Prisoner Mzia Amaglobeli

The case of Mzia Amaglobeli has become one of the prominent examples of legal prosecution of media representatives in Georgia. The criminal proceedings against her and the resulting verdict was widely assessed as politically motivated, which reinforces concerns about the state of media freedom in the country.<sup>55</sup> Monitoring reports of local and international organizations reported that systemic shortcomings were identified in

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<sup>51</sup> CoE Human Rights Commissioner, 21 April, 2026.

<sup>52</sup> CMIS, *Safety Challenges Facing Independent Media in Georgia* (2025); Reporters without Borders (RSF), *Unprecedented Crackdown in Georgia: 600 Attacks against the Press in One Year* (2025).

<sup>53</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2026: The Growing Shadow of Autocracy* (2026).

<sup>54</sup> CMIS, *Covering court proceedings: Obstructions for journalists* (2026).

<sup>55</sup> CMIS, *Safety Challenges Facing Independent Media in Georgia* (2025); Reporters without Borders (RSF), *Unprecedented Crackdown in Georgia: 600 Attacks against the Press in One Year* (2025).

the process, which affected the fairness of the case and raised questions about the independence of the judiciary.<sup>56</sup>

Mzia Amaglobeli was a founder and director of the leading media organizations Batumelebi and Netgazeti. She was arrested on January 12, 2025, for slapping a local police chief in the face and was charged for the assault on police officer. The court sentenced her to two years' imprisonment. The Appellate Court upheld the decision while the Supreme Court rejected the lawsuit at all.<sup>57</sup>

It is noteworthy that the launch of the criminal prosecution against the journalist, instead of an administrative response, was assessed as a politically motivated decision. Such an approach creates a dangerous precedent, where journalists' activities may become the basis of criminal liability.<sup>58</sup>

During the ongoing court proceedings, the public statements of senior government officials, in which the defendant was negatively represented, raised questions about the protection of the presumption of innocence. Such rhetoric creates preliminary feelings and impacts public opinion as well as independence of the judiciary process. The problems related with the equality of arms were also observed during trial. The court mainly relied on the testimonies of the witnesses of the prosecution and less likely considered the evidence presented by the defense side.<sup>59</sup>

Proportionality of the verdict passed against Mzia Amaglobeli was topic of acute criticism. The court judgment was evaluated as disproportionate, particularly when there was possibility to use alternative sanctions. The judgment is perceived as an example how legal mechanisms can be applied to achieve preventive and intimidating effect.<sup>60</sup>

Case of Mzia Amaglobeli is important indicator how the judiciary system may be used to restrict critical voices, that, in long-term perspective, has negative impact on media environment and democratic development of the country.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Clooney Foundation for Justice, *TrialWatch: Georgia v. Mzia Amaglobeli* (2026).

<sup>57</sup> Radio Liberty, Supreme Court rejected the case of Mzia Amaglobeli, 04 March, 2026

<sup>58</sup> Clooney Foundation for Justice, *TrialWatch: Georgia v. Mzia Amaglobeli* (2026).

<sup>59</sup> Clooney Foundation for Justice, *TrialWatch: Georgia v. Mzia Amaglobeli* (2026).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid

<sup>61</sup> CMIS, *Safety Challenges Facing Independent Media in Georgia* (2025); Reporters without Borders (RSF), *Unprecedented Crackdown in Georgia: 600 Attacks against the Press in One Year* (2025).

## Restrictions for Foreign Journalists

In the reporting period, there were cases, in which foreign journalists were restricted from entering Georgia or from carrying out their professional activities. Such restrictions violate media rights, negatively affect the country's international image, and reduce global media interest in Georgia, which in turn limits the access of international audiences to independent information about ongoing developments in the country<sup>62</sup>.

In 2024-2025, the practice of restricting entry and departure of foreign journalists and photographers into/from Georgia revealed a new and alarming trend in the context of media freedom. According to the publicly available information, during the reporting period there were at least 9 documented cases of refusal of entry into the country and one case of restriction on departure from the country. This indicates a recurring administrative practice rather than isolated incidents.<sup>63</sup>

One of the features of these cases is ungrounded decisions. The following formulation is used as justification for the refusal – “other cases envisaged under the Georgian legislation” – without additional clarifications. This practice contradicts the principle of legal certainty and complicates the process of appealing the decision as well as assessment of its legitimacy. Additionally, it creates a space for selective approach and alleged political motivation.<sup>64</sup>

Most facts of refusal to enter the country referred to the journalists coming from EU states, part of whom had already actively engaged in covering the ongoing developments in Georgia. In some cases, journalists spent several hours in the airport that further worsened their legal status and increased psychological oppression.<sup>65</sup>

It is worth of particular noting that journalists, who had already lived in Georgia and cooperated with local media, were denied to enter the country.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2026: The Growing Shadow of Autocracy* (2026).

<sup>63</sup> CMIS, *Cases of restrictions for foreign journalists in Georgia* (2025).

<sup>64</sup> Ibid

<sup>65</sup> Ibid

<sup>66</sup> Ibid

The only documented case of the refusal to depart from the country is related with Afgan Sadygov, who initially was not allowed to leave country but later he was detained and sentenced to extradition arrest.<sup>67</sup>

Restriction of the travel of foreign journalists in Georgia is not a technical issue of immigration control. It shall be evaluated as an instrument to influence the media environment, particularly in the case, when restrictions are applied against the journalists covering politically sensitive topics.<sup>68</sup>

## Case of Afgan Sadygov and Its Impact on Media Environment

Case of Afgan Sadygov is a significant precedent, which unifies the issues of media freedom, a rule-of-law state and implementation of the international obligations.<sup>69</sup>

Afgan Sadygov, who arrived in Georgia because he was persecuted in his home country, Azerbaijan, was deprived of the right to leave the country in July 2024. In August, he was arrested based on the request of the Azerbaijan side to be extradited there. To protest his arrest and the decisions against him, Sadygov started a hunger strike, which later turned into a long-term protest and lasted several months. His health conditions significantly worsened, which alarmed many human rights organizations. In February 2025, the European Court of Human Rights imposed an interim measure and prohibited Georgia from extraditing Sadygov to Azerbaijan before his case is substantially examined. After this decision, Sadygov stopped his hunger strike, and in April 2025 he was released from prison.<sup>70</sup>

Nevertheless, in April 2026, the case of Afgan Sadygov developed in another direction. The Tbilisi City Court found him guilty of an administrative offence on the grounds of insulting a police officer through social media. He was fined 2,000 GEL, expelled from

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid

<sup>68</sup> Ibid

<sup>69</sup> MFRR denounces Sadygov's deportation as a stark example of transnational repression against journalists, 10 April, 2026.

<sup>70</sup> Tabula, MIA: Afgan Sadygov was expelled from the country; he was banned to enter country for 3 years, April 5, 2026

Georgia, and banned from re-entering the country for a period of three years. The decision was made under expedited procedures and within a short timeframe.<sup>71</sup>

Several key aspects are particularly significant. First, the use of expulsion on the basis of an administrative offense raises questions regarding proportionality and necessity, especially when the alleged offense is based on expression made on social media. Another important issue concerns the effective implementation of international legal obligations. Although no formal extradition took place, the expulsion decision effectively produced the same outcome that the interim measure of the European Court of Human Rights had sought to prevent. This raises questions about the practical effectiveness of international mechanisms.<sup>72</sup>

The significance of the case extends beyond the dispute of a single journalist and represents a broader example of transnational persecution. This case may be viewed as part of a wider trend of pressure against journalists, which is particularly significant from the perspective of protecting media freedom.<sup>73</sup>

## October 4, 2025 Elections and Protest Demonstration

The increase in pressure on media representatives during the electoral period negatively affected the quality of the news environment and the level of media freedom. Restrictions on media activity reduce voters' ability to receive diverse and reliable information, which increases the influence of disinformation and makes it more difficult to make informed choices.<sup>74</sup>

Municipal elections on October 4, 2025, which were boycotted by part of the opposition, were held in Georgia in a high-risk media environment, characterized by numerous incidents of interference with journalists' professional activities, as well as threats, verbal abuse, and physical confrontations against them.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Social Justice Center, *Case of Afgan Sadygov*, (April 6, 2026)

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>74</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2026: The Growing Shadow of Autocracy* (2026); CMIS, *October 4 Elections and Media* (2026).

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*

Analysis of the observed cases shows that aggression against journalists was manifested in different forms – starting from verbal assaults to direct interference with the professional activities and attempted physical confrontation. The rhetoric of high-ranking officials is particularly noteworthy, which created a negative environment for the media. Such statements had an impact not only on concrete journalists but also contributed to the discrediting of the media in wider society.<sup>76</sup>

A similar trend was also observed among other political actors, who used insulting or discrediting language toward journalists, thereby intensifying polarization and creating a hostile environment for journalistic activity. Such rhetoric also increased the risk of aggressive behavior by third parties.<sup>77</sup>

In parallel to the Elections, the large-scaled protest demonstration in Tbilisi revealed systemic problems of the safety of media representatives. Multiple cases of physical and verbal assault on journalists, interference with professional activities and damaging or seizing of technical equipment were documented.<sup>78</sup>

Relations with law enforcement agencies remain one of the main challenges for journalists. In some cases, media representatives were directly obstructed in carrying out their work, including through the use of physical force, which raises questions regarding the proportionality of the use of force.<sup>79</sup>

Particularly alarming are those cases, when special means were used in the space, where journalists worked, which increased their safety risks. Lack of preliminary warning further complicated this problem. The facts of the damage and loss of technical equipment were observed, among them in relation with filming equipment, which indicates at additional obstructions for the operation of media.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid

<sup>77</sup> Ibid

<sup>78</sup> CMIS, Media and October 4 Protest, (2025)

<sup>79</sup> Ibid

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

Taken together, these events demonstrate that covering protest rallies continues to expose journalists to multiple risks, including risks to physical safety, the protection of technical equipment, and the freedom to carry out their professional activities.<sup>81</sup>

## Public Broadcaster

Developments surrounding the First Channel of the Public Broadcaster have become one of the most significant and concerning issues within the Georgian media environment. These developments reflect both the weakness of institutional independence and the increasing politicization of management practices. The reporting period coincided with the strengthening of the pro-European protest movement in the country, providing additional context for assessing the performance of the Public Broadcaster and raising questions regarding its role in a democratic society.<sup>82</sup>

Escalation of the crisis in the Public Broadcaster is directly linked to the ongoing political processes in the country, namely to the political decision made in November 2024, which halted EU-integration process of the country. The decision was followed by large-scale protest demonstrations, which should have been intensively and critically covered by the media. However, the Public Broadcaster's editorial policy failed to meet the public demand for in-depth, impartial, and comprehensive information. As a result, criticism toward the broadcaster intensified, both from the public and from its own employees.<sup>83</sup>

Part of the employees of the Public Broadcaster publicly announced their dissatisfaction with the editorial policy of the channel and requested to open airtime to pluralistic discussions. Additionally, initiative groups were established, whose purpose was to protect professional standards and to ensure institutional recovery of the channel.<sup>84</sup> Mostly, the management had repressive response to the criticism. Starting from spring of 2025, disciplinary sanctions were applied against employees, they were fired or were compelled to move to other projects. It is worth to note that mostly those employees

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid

<sup>82</sup> CMIS, Crisis in the 1<sup>st</sup> Channel of the Public Broadcaster and Repressive Politics of the Management, February 14, 2026

<sup>83</sup> Ibid

<sup>84</sup> Ibid

became targets of the sanctions, who openly spoke about the editorial policy of the Broadcaster, about the interference in the activities of journalists or expressed their solidarity with the media representatives.<sup>85</sup>

In parallel to the repressive politics, significant changes were also introduced in the programming policy. Several programs were closed, including “Realuri Sivrcce” (*Real Space*), which had been distinguished by its coverage of pressing social issues and critical discourse. These decisions were often formally justified by expired project terms or changes in strategic priorities; however, considering the broader context, they were perceived as a mechanism for limiting editorial space.<sup>86</sup>

The role of the Board of Trustees was another significant aspect of the crisis. In several instances, the actions of the majority of the Board members were perceived as supportive of management rather than as exercising independent oversight. Initiative to legally assess the activities of critical journalists, as well as tightening rules for the attendance at the sessions, reduced transparency and restricted accountability mechanisms. As a result, the management system of the Broadcaster became more closed and less accessible for the employees and the society.<sup>87</sup>

## Communications Commission

The Communications Commission (ComCom), which under the law is mandated to function as an independent regulator and safeguard media freedom, has increasingly been perceived as an instrument of political pressure. The Commission’s decisions have a substantial impact on the functioning of the broadcasting sector; the expansion of its mandate in the area of content regulation has heightened concerns regarding potential censorship and raised questions about the regulator’s impartiality. Background information on both former and current leadership of ComCom indicates close links to political and media sectors, further intensifying concerns about its institutional neutrality. This issue is particularly significant in cases, where the regulator makes

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid

<sup>86</sup> Ibid

<sup>87</sup> Ibid

decisions concerning the activities of independent media outlets. In recent years, ComCom's practice has been criticized as an example of selective regulation, reflected in the initiation of administrative proceedings and the imposition of sanctions on independent broadcasters.<sup>88</sup>

Special attention is paid to the performance of the Commission, when the decisions of the regulator are related to the pre-election period and political context. Such practice is often perceived as widening the content oversight of the regulator, which impacts media pluralism and balance of the information environment.<sup>89</sup>

Rhetoric and public statements of the former chairperson of the ComCom Kakha Bekauri, who was sanctioned among others by the EU member state, as well as the decisions made by the Commission during his tenure, have been critically assessed as factors contributing to increased pressure on independent media. In addition, the Commission's personnel policy and perceived institutional opacity have been identified as further factors affecting the regulator's independence. This circumstance reinforces perceptions that the Commission does not function as a fully independent regulatory body.<sup>90</sup>

In 2026, two new members were added to the Communications Commission, namely after the term of the previous members expired, Goga Gulordava and Ani Vazagashvili joined the ComCom. Both of them had worked in the TFV Company Imedi, which, together with PostTV, was sanctioned by the Great Britain for the dissemination of Russian propaganda.<sup>91</sup> Under the leadership of the new chairman of the ComCom, Gulordava, the commission renewed restrictive regulations against broadcasters.<sup>92</sup>

Analysis of the existing practice demonstrates that the role of the regulator shall be reviewed to ensure its compliance with the standards protecting media pluralism and free media.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> SWD (2025), European Commission.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid

<sup>90</sup> Media Advocacy Commission, *The Communications Commission's pressure on independent media: the problematic legacy of sanctioned Kakha Bekauri (2026); Oppression on Independent Media (2026)*

<sup>91</sup> Radio Liberty, Britain sanctioned Imedi and PostTV, February 24, 2026

<sup>92</sup> Media Advocacy Coalition, Vakhtang Abashidze – Faithful member of the repressive system, 2026.

<sup>93</sup> SWD (2025), European Commission.

## Conclusion

In 2025-2026, media environment in Georgia was characterized by sharp and systemic worsening, which indicates at the targeted and institutionalized oppression. Repressive legislative amendments, criminalization of the journalists' activities, high rate of violence and lack of effective response to those crimes created the environment, which significantly restricted the activities of the independent media.

Pressure on the media is exercised through legal and administrative mechanisms, as well as through targeted discrediting and disinformation campaigns, which undermine public trust in the media and hinder the provision of reliable information to society. In addition, the closure of court proceedings and restrictions on access to public information weaken the media's ability to perform its public watchdog function.

The existing environment reinforces the tendency of self-censorship and restricts the space for pluralist discussion, which negatively impacts the quality of democratic processes. These processes, in conjunction with international assessments, show worsened media freedom in Georgia, which contributes to the democratic backsliding and increases risks for the institutional resilience of the country.