

**Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy  
and Development**

**Institute for War and Peace Reporting**

# **REGIONAL MEDIA MAP OF GEORGIA**

Financed by European Commission

Project  
Georgia Regional Media Development  
and Public Accountability

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## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY AND METHODOLOGY USED

In December 2003, the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development initiated a study of the media situation in the regions of Georgia. The purpose of the study is to draw a general picture of media development in the regions of Georgia and to identify major problems that hinder the development of the media – especially the print media – in the regions, and also to find ways to improve the work of regional media organisations.

This study forms part of a project entitled *Georgia Regional Media Development and Public Accountability*, which is financed by the European Commission within the framework of the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights and aims to provide support to the print media in Georgia. The project is being implemented by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (London, Great Britain) with the participation of the Caucasus Institute of Peace, Democracy and Development (Tbilisi, Georgia). Five print media organisations in various parts of Georgia have been selected within the framework of the project, and they are provided with support to raise their professional level, improve their organisational structure and improve their technical equipment. At the same time, the project plans also include studying the media situation in the regions of Georgia, with the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development being responsible for implementing this task.

The first stage of the study comprised 15 towns in various regions of Georgia: Akhalkalaki, Akhaltsikhe, Batumi, Bolnisi, Gori, Gurjaani, Telavi, Zugdidi, Lanchkhuti, Marneuli, Senaki, Kutaisi, Poti, Chokhatauri, and Khashuri. The small number of sites can be explained by the fact that the objective of the study at that stage was to draw a general picture that would enable the project to identify practical priorities. As the result of this stage, a first and incomplete version of the *Media Map of Georgia* was created.

In April 2004, the Caucasus Institute started to implement the second stage of the study comprising all of Georgia's regions,<sup>1</sup> which resulted in

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<sup>1</sup> Studies were conducted in 10 of the 11 regions of Georgia: Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli, Kakheti, Mtskheta-Mtianeti, Shida Kartli, Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti, Imereti, Samegrelo and Zemo Svaneti, Guria, Ajara. The *Regional Media Map of Georgia* does not reflect the media situation in Tbilisi, the Georgian capital.

the creation of the complete version of the *Regional Media Map of Georgia*. The findings of the study according to region will be posted on the websites of the Institute for War and Peace Reporting and the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development: [www.iwpr.net](http://www.iwpr.net) & [www.cipdd.org](http://www.cipdd.org)

The conception of the Media Map has been jointly elaborated by both organizations involved in the project. Malkhaz Saldadze and George Shubitidze participated in the creation of the *Media Map*. General supervision for preparing the report was provided by Ghia Nodia.

In all cases discussed, the study is based on interviews done locally by the Caucasus Institute of Peace, Democracy and Development researchers with representatives of the media, local governments, civil organisations and societies, and also with randomly selected members of the public. In addition, an analysis of media production has also been used.

## MAIN FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This study is based on the findings of field research undertaken between April 2004 and December 2005. During 2005, summary reports were written of the research that had been conducted, according to which the text of *Regional Media Map<sup>2</sup> of Georgia* was prepared, and its structure was based on the order in which research was conducted in each region.

### General Picture

The media space across the different regions of Georgia forms a very diverse picture. This is due to many factors: economy, geographic location and the size of the region. Moreover, there is a lot of differences between various towns within the regions themselves<sup>3</sup>.

In addition, the print media differs in its circulation and periodicity according to regions. The average circulation of newspapers ranges from

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<sup>2</sup> The first report prepared within the framework of the project *Development of Regional Media in Georgia and Civil Accountability* was named *Media Map of Georgia*. Considering that the study did not cover the media in the capital city, the group of researchers from the *Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development* decided that the complete version of this study should be titled the *Regional Media Map of Georgia*.

<sup>3</sup> A detailed discussion of these differences can be found in the relevant section for each region.

500 to 1,000 copies, though, sometimes circulation reaches 3,500 copies, but there are also cases when a newspaper has a circulation of only 200 copies. On average they come out once a week, but there are newspapers which are published once a fortnight or once a month. In fact, even such periodicity cannot be maintained. As for ownership, in the regional print media state-owned organisations prevail.

Differences among electronic media organisations are caused by the size of their coverage areas, airtime, and the length and number of their own programmes within this airtime. Regions are rarely covered in full, though television and radio companies normally manage to broadcast in most of the region, or in the towns and neighbouring areas to where they operate. Ajara is the only region with a nation-wide broadcasting company. As for airtime, the electronic media broadcasts either for 24 or for 12-16 hours. It should be pointed out that most part of regional television and radio companies' airtime is filled with programmes from Tbilisi-based broadcasting companies. On average, the regional electronic media's own airtime lasts for two to five hours, which is used to broadcast news, educational-analytical and entertainment programmes, and also commercial announcements. Some radio stations stand out among other regional electronic media for their level of development, and are close to the standards of modern journalism. They also are members of the *Radio Network of Georgia*. In terms of ownership, most of the regional electronic media are private organisations. There are rare cases when the local government is one of the founders; some electronic media operate on the basis of local non-governmental organisations (e.g. in Samegrelo).

In terms of values, the private sector media is more open to liberal principles and norms than the governmental media, though this is not the case with all of them.

The main barrier for the development of the local media is the lack of efficiency. Due to a lack of technical and human resources, both the print and electronic media are unable to report on a complete spectrum of events on a timely basis (this issue is more of a problem for the print media, with its low periodicity and circulation). Hence the public gets most of its news from the central press and television.

### **Economic Basis of the Media**

Economic stability is the biggest problem faced by the regional media. The advertisement market that would ensure the financial welfare of the

local media is underdeveloped. In bigger towns and administrative centres, though the economic infrastructure is weakly developed, the private or state sector makes some orders to local newspapers, television and radio stations, but in regional centres media organisations lack even this. It appears that independent media organisations can only survive if they are involved in unions that will bring them financial benefit: they should either participate in coalition or media development projects and programmes run by international organisations, or cooperate with the local government or local political and economic groups. In some cases a newspaper generates its own income from additional business activities, for example, printing facilities or other services.

### **Technical Equipment and Infrastructure**

The quality of technical equipment regional media organisations own depends on their financial and economic condition. This in turn is determined by many factors: geographic location or the involvement of the given organisation in networks of groups with economic interests or in civil society and international organisations. In fact, the latter aspect plays a significant role in solving problems related to the media's technical equipment. An analysis of the situation shows that from a technical viewpoint, organisations which receive assistance from international donor organisations have noticeably better conditions.

A whole range of factors hinder the full functioning of the media:

- The print media in the regions have almost no publishing houses and mostly have to print their newspapers in Tbilisi. This negatively affects their periodicity. It is true that there are publishing houses in Kutaisi, Batumi and Poti (although, even Poti newspapers do not use the publishing house in Poti), but the media in neighbouring towns prefer Tbilisi publishing houses, considering print quality and prices;
- The permanent crisis in power supply remains a serious problem for electronic media organisations. These organisations may not face this problem themselves, or are able to ensure broadcasting with the power-generator, but they find it difficult to deliver their product to the public;
- The print media also finds it difficult to deliver its products to the population; the former network of Sakpres (Georgia Press) and the Postal Service no longer function; newspaper editorial boards, therefore, have to find their own means for distribution, though this hinders



the distribution of newspapers in many districts, especially mountainous ones, where the transport and road infrastructure has collapsed;

- The operation of electronic media organisations is facilitated by the infrastructure of masts and transmitters owned by the state-founded *Tele-Radio Centre of Georgia* limited company. Television and radio companies send out their signal on the basis of agreements with this organisation. Although the amount that the *Georgia Tele-Radio Centre* charges for its services is defined by how much its partner organisations can afford, many regional media owe money to this organisation. However, the centre has never terminated broadcasting for this reason alone. Some television or radio companies use their own masts and transmitters for broadcasting;
- Cable network broadcasting is practised in Signagi and Kutaisi; in this case, the audience they reach and the quality of broadcasting depend on the condition of old transmitting cables from the Soviet period; often problems are caused in the electronic media's service infrastructure because the signals of various television companies overlap. This happens frequently in the lowlands of the western Georgia, where the frequencies of some regional and Tbilisi-based television and radio companies clash with those from Samegrelo and Imereti; this is exacerbated both by incorrect calculations and the local terrain. The Communications Regulatory Commission of Georgia has been working actively to solve these problems and in many places complaints are no longer made about local television stations.

### **Problem of Qualified Personnel**

Qualified personnel is the most important factor for the development of the regional media. In this regard, the situation of media organisations varies in different regions, in different towns within the regions, and also varies according to the form of ownership.

This is felt particularly in Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli, Mtskheta-Mtianeti and Racha-Lechkhumi, where media organisations cannot employ young people due to the local economic and social conditions, and young people educated in journalism prefer either working in the capital, or for various non-governmental and international organisations in their region.

There is a certain correlation between qualified personnel and the size of towns, their infrastructure and the economic stability of the local media.

Comparatively more qualified personnel are employed in regional administrative centres and by media organisations in large industrial towns. In small agricultural district centres the local media is staffed by people who worked for the old Soviet media organisations.

In the state media, the majority of the journalists are middle Aged and do not think about introducing modern journalistic standards and new working styles. In the private sector, editorial boards pay much attention to improving the level of professionalism of both their journalists and their technical and administrative personnel. The owners of media organisations emphasise that it is very difficult for them to attract qualified personnel; it is also difficult to maintain human resources or upgrade the current level. The regional media is greatly assisted by representatives of international and local civil society, who hold joint activities and trainings with representatives of the independent media. In comparison to the private media, one of the characteristic features of the state-owned media is that they employ more administrative and technical personnel than journalists. According to our observations, in private media organisations in a similar situation there are more problems related to their contents and to developing their marketing, rather than in media organisations, where the situation is opposite (cases when journalists prevail upon administrative and technical staff); and their production is more interesting for the audience, and, correspondingly, sales are higher.

The local market and the economic situation do not allow media organisations to develop internal structures within the organisation such as marketing, advertisement and distribution. Very few regional media organisations could manage to introduce innovations in this respect and thus ensure their organisational sustainability.

### **Journalistic Unions**

Regional media organisations and journalists often enter into partnerships with one another. Such cooperation and the establishment of partnership networks mainly takes place within the framework of coalition projects and trainings provided by western donor organisations; for example, the *Radio Network of Georgia* union, which consists of five radio stations in western and eastern Georgia, was established under the aegis of Radio *Tavisupleba* (Radio Liberty). Under the aegis of the Tbilisi-based television company *Rustavi 2*, the *Georgia Association of Independent Broadcasting*

was established, which is a good example to show that cooperation within the framework of the union enables weaker TV companies to fill their airtime with broadcasts from a stronger organisation, and also enables the stronger one to broadcast throughout the whole country without any extra expenses.

As for the print media, there are almost no formal networks or unions, if one does not take into account common national unions such as the *Journalists Federation of Georgia*, which consists of many representatives of the regional print media. Such unions aim to share experiences and create a common space for information. Common programmes of the local TV companies are joined within the framework of the project *Parallel* of the *Samtskhe-Javakheti Association for Media Development* and these programmes are broadcasted by all the organisations involved in the network.

The small number of journalistic unions and the limited number of joint activities within them represent the biggest problems for regional media development. If international organisations were involved in establishing and operating such unions, this would greatly contribute to solving this problem.

## **Media and Minorities**

The problems of minorities living in Georgia are not adequately reflected in the regional media. Such groups, as a rule, are ethnic and religious minorities; other sub-cultural groups are never referred to by the media at all.

The map of the geographic distribution of ethnic minorities is in general represented by two ethnic enclaves – Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, where Armenian and Azeri communities reside compactly. However, the same Azeri, Armenian, also Ossetian, Abkhazian and Chechen (Kists) communities live in other parts of Georgia. Whereas ethnic groups are located geographically, religious minorities are dispersed throughout the whole territory of Georgia at random and are not concentrated geographically on the basis of their confession. There are various demands towards the regional media; for example, most of the local media in the Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions are published or broadcasted in the language the population speaks, there is thus a demand for balanced information and high-quality reporting; ethnic minorities residing in other re-

gions face problems publishing and broadcasting in their native language. As for religious minorities, especially those who do not possess the status of so-called 'traditional religions', their interests and problems are not discussed in the regional media. Habitually, newspapers or TV and radio programmes mention this or that confession in a negative context and this has a very extremist shade. In this regard, it can be said that Georgia's central media organisations set the tone for the regional media. This of course does not mean that such an approach is characteristic to all electronic media organisations in all regions. Some print and electronic media organisations try to remain politically correct and follow the norms of the journalism code even in reference to minorities.

As far as the coverage of minority problems is concerned, progress in the regional media will be possible if international organisations cooperate more actively with the local media to create an information space focused on minority problems.

## SAMTSKHE-JAVAKHETI<sup>1</sup>

	<b>Area (km<sup>2</sup>)<sup>2</sup></b>
<b>Samtskhe-Javakheti</b>	<b>6 412,9</b>
Adigeni	799,5
Aspindza	825,3
Akhalkalaki	1 235
Akhaltzikhe	1 010,3
Borjomi	1 189
Ninotsminda	1 353,8

Samtskhe-Javakheti makes up 9.3% of Georgia's total area and 4.75%<sup>3</sup> of its total population. With a gross domestic product index of 0.48, Samtskhe-Javakheti's macroeconomic indicators rank it in eighth place among Georgia's eleven regions.

<b>Population<sup>4</sup></b>						
	Total	Georgian	Armenian	Russian	Ossetian	Other
<b>Samtskhe-Javakheti</b>	<b>207 598</b>	<b>89 995</b>	<b>113 347</b>	<b>2 230</b>	<b>822</b>	<b>1 204</b>
Adigeni	20 752	19 860	698	101	28	65
Aspindza	13 010	10 671	2 273	34	9	23
Akhalkalaki	60 975	3 214	57 516	157	10	78
Akhaltzikhe	46 134	28 473	16 879	410	52	320
Borjomi	32 422	27 301	3 124	585	719	693
Ninotsminda	34 305	476	32 857	943	4	25

### The Specific Features of the Region and their Influence on Media Development in Samtskhe-Javakheti

Samtskhe-Javakheti is considered to be one of Georgia's most difficult regions. For years, the state paid no attention to the region, and it

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<sup>1</sup> This study of the Samtskhe-Javakheti region was carried out between 19 and 23 April 2004.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.parliament.ge/GENERAL/stat/gmain.htm> // The Socio-Economic Situation of Georgia 1997

<sup>3</sup> Results of the 2002 Census// State Department of Statistics. Tbilisi 2002.

<sup>4</sup> The distribution of permanent residents according to their nationalities in the scope of administrative-territory (regions), towns and districts // State Department of Statistics. Tbilisi 2002.

became a paradise of corruption for local bureaucrats. Illegal felling of the region's timber resources (in Meskheti) became a source of wealth for the financial elite and for the region's corrupt administration (with patronage from Tbilisi). Public distrust in the state has been fuelled by the growing social gap between rich and poor and the deterioration of the Soviet-era economic infrastructure, leading to increased interest in alternative sources of information, especially at the local level. It is for precisely this reason that a strong independent media exists in the region and it is trusted by the public. But the picture drawn according to the situation of the region does not correspond to the public demand in this respect, for the following reasons:

- The non-governmental sector, which could act as a space for generating alternative information and could protect the independent media from the local government and government-supported financial groups, is underdeveloped in the region.
- The local public's weak purchasing power makes it hard to break even, which causes the media, especially the print media, to collaborate with the local government.
- No economic infrastructure exists which might provide an advertising market and generate an independent source of income for the local media.
- The media is often used as a political tool by opposing political groups and by representatives of the local business elite. In such cases, they either 'order' (i.e. pay for) the article they want to be written, or they themselves own media organisations. This apparent bias results in public distrust of the media.
- An opinion exists that the local media is always serving the interests of a particular official or individual, rather than speaking on behalf of the 'grassroots'.

There are two dominant ethnic groups among the Samtskhe-Javakheti population: Georgians and Armenians. This is an important factor in media development, since Georgians and Armenians reside compactly in two different parts of the region. Akhaltsikhe is the only district where there is a balance between ethnic groups: the ratio of Georgians to Armenians in Akhaltsikhe is 60 to 40. Adigeni, Aspindza and Borjomi are inhabited mainly by Georgians. In Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda, most of the population are Armenians.

This demographic picture is reflected in the region's linguistic divisions. In the Adigeni, Aspindza and Borjomi districts the media is all in Georgian. Until recently, the media in the Akhaltsikhe district was only in Georgian. However, a new newspaper called *Samkhretis Karibche* has been founded which is published in Georgian and Armenian (the Georgian version of the newspaper is prepared by editors in Akhaltsikhe and the Armenian version by editors in Akhalkalaki). In Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda, the media is generally in Armenian. A small proportion of reports in the print and electronic media are in Russian.

### **Differences within the Region by Town**

With its three newspapers and two television companies, Akhaltsikhe stands out in terms of the number of media organisations per town. Recently, a new newspaper, *Samkhretis Karibche*, was founded with assistance from the Institute for War and Peace Reporting within the framework of a project entitled 'Georgian Media Development and Civil Accountability'<sup>5</sup>. Akhaltsikhe's prominence over other towns is explained by the fact that Akhaltsikhe is the regional centre and the biggest town in Samtskhe-Javakheti.

In terms of electronic media organisations, Akhalkalaki stands out with its two television companies and a radio station. The print media consists of one newspaper. Akhalkalaki is also notable for the news agency, *A-Info*; this agency does not collaborate with the local media, however, and its main users are Armenian newspapers and companies outside Georgia (in Armenia and European countries). This is reflected in the local media: local television and radio stations do not have news bulletins, and newspapers do not report local news either (since informal channels are more effective), instead publishing more general stories and features. Thus, the existence of a news agency does not automatically provide local media development.

In Borjomi and Ninotsminda, the media is represented by one newspaper and one television company. Two newspapers are published in Aspindza. An attempt was made to establish a TV company, but it was unsuccessful due to financial problems.

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<sup>5</sup> This newspaper did not exist when Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development researchers conducted research in Akhaltsikhe, so it is not included in this chapter.

Adigeni is the weakest district in the region from the viewpoint of media development, since only one newspaper is published there.

There are differences among the region's towns not only in the number of media organisations, but also in their degree of independence and way of working. Regarding the print media, there is no difference between the towns, at least if one does not consider the newly founded newspaper *Samkhretis Karibche* in Akhaltsikhe. Most are owned by the local government, or are under governmental control even if they are nominally independent. All of these factors undoubtedly shape the working style of the print media. Differences are more apparent in the electronic media; Borjomi and Akhaltsikhe are the most developed.

There are two television companies in Akhaltsikhe, and this competition forces them to battle for an audience and to gain authority among the public. They are thus more oriented towards news bulletins and try to consider the public interest in their operations. This is also helped by the fact that unlike other towns of the region, the non-governmental sector is more active, collaborates with the TV companies at an expert level, and also provides reports for them to broadcast (e.g. in connection to illegal timber felling).

There are also two television companies, but the situation there is significantly different from Akhaltsikhe. These companies are not oriented towards local events and do not report local problems in an analytical fashion. They do cooperate with non-governmental organisations, which provide support in enhancing the professional level of journalists and editors, but so far this has not had the same effects as in Akhaltsikhe. It is thus difficult to say that the electronic media in Akhaltsikhe play a significant role in the social life of the region.

There is only one television company in Borjomi, and like Akhaltsikhe, its case can be considered unusual in terms of media development, since *Borjomi TV* has cooperated with international donor organisations.

## **Print Media**

There are a total of seven newspapers published in the region, two of which are not of a socio-political nature. It is difficult to assess how independent the other five are. They are either possessed by the Gamgeoba (local government in the region) or are formally independent but in fact depend on the Gamgeoba. The formally independent print media's depen-



dence on the local government is caused primarily by financial and economic problems. As a rule, editorial staff 'have to' ask the government for help in order to survive, and then carry out its orders. This type of dependence was clearly visible in an incident in which the editors of the newspaper *Akhaltsikhe* exposed the fact that a publishing house had been sold illegally, after which the government put pressure on the paper by saying it would stop financing it.

As a rule, most newspapers in Samtskhe-Javakheti are published once a month. The only exception is the newspaper *Borjomi*, which comes out weekly. Because they come out so infrequently, the papers have a minimal level of news and cannot meet their readers' interest on issues of current importance. A number of interrelated problems also limit their circulation. The newspapers are closely linked to the Gamgeobas, so they do not consider the public sector or people's interests. The papers publish the Gamgeoba's decrees and state what has happened in the region (usually this information is out of date); they also publish information about important events occurring in Georgia (also out of date), devote articles to various personalities, and make congratulatory and obituary announcements. This is clearly reflected on the number of potential readers: people have no desire to buy newspapers because 'there is no news in them'<sup>6</sup>. Newspaper editors thus ask the Gamgeoba to make administrative staff subscribe to the newspaper. They thus have a small, stable circulation (usually 500 to 700 copies) and periodicity. Circulation and periodicity are also influenced by the fact that there are no functioning publishing houses in the region. Almost all the newspapers (with a few small exceptions) are designed and published either in Tbilisi or in Yerevan. On one hand, this increases the cost and, consequently, its unit price, which also has an impact on their number of readers. On the other hand, it also increases the amount of time it takes to publish each issue (which also affects how regularly they are published).

## Electronic Media

The electronic media is much more developed than the print media. There are seven television and radio companies operating in the region. All of them are independent and are in the private sector. They have some

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with passers-by

financial problems, which affects their level of independence. They are mostly thought to be under the influence either of the Gamgeoba or of one or other political party (for example, one of the two TV companies in Akhaltsikhe is associated with the 'New Rights' parties, while the other is linked to the 'National Movement'). Media organisations which receive funding from international donor organisations tend to be more independent than the others (though sometimes it is difficult to talk about independence even with these organisations).

One of the most serious problems faced by electronic media organisations in Samtskhe-Javakheti is obtaining licenses. Only two media organisations in the region have broadcasting licenses. Very often, the absence of a license affects their level of independence. If the government finds a TV company's style of operating unacceptable, the license problem can be used by the local government to put pressure on the media.

There is a union of electronic media organisations in the region, the *Media Development Association of Samtskhe-Javakheti*, which comprises the region's four television companies. The companies share news and broadcast a joint programme 'Paraleli'. (This project is financed by IREX).

One of the electronic media's unsolved problems is their lack of finances, which originates from the absence of an advertising market in the region (it seems this is overcome through collaboration with international donor organisations, but this can only temporarily solve their financial and technical problems). Income is generated only from publishing obituaries and congratulations. The electronic media competes with the print media in this regard, because it can provide this service more quickly. Despite this, however, such finances are not enough for these television companies to operate to their full potential.

## **Media and Government**

The relationship between the media and government in Samtskhe-Javakheti cannot be described as tense, especially since the Rose Revolution. The print media has seldom overstepped 'constructive' or acceptable critical limits in its relations with the local government either before or since the Revolution. As a rule, the newspapers remain in the possession of the government, or are formally independent but are financially 'fed' from the local budget, or do not pay the Gamgeoba for the rent of the editorial office. Despite this, there have been cases when

even the most harmless article has incurred the anger of the district administration. For instance, the regional newspaper *Samtskhe-Javakheti* was closed down only because Gigla Baramidze, the governor at the time, did not like an article titled 'Is There Any Alternative to Shevardnadze' published during the election campaign (in 1999), and also because he was unhappy that an article about the governor, with his photo, did not take up much space because the paper also had an interview with the Patriarch of Georgia. This was deemed reason enough to 'arrest' this issue (all copies were removed from circulation). After this, the regional budget was unable to finance *Samtskhe-Javakheti*, and the newspaper was closed down. In other cases, editors were threatened that their building would be taken off them, their rent would be increased, or that their funding would be reduced.

In the electronic media, the local government is criticised much more by the Georgian language channels than the Armenian ones. This is because the television companies in Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda do not have broadcasting licenses, and this could be used by the government to put pressure on them. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the television companies' inactivity is not caused by legal difficulties and problems obtaining a license alone. One of the television companies in Akhaltsikhe did not have a license until recently, but it was still able to oppose and severely criticise the government. This company did not avoid controversial reports and was ready to name corrupt public officials. In such cases, government pressure was expressed by cancelling accreditation to attend sessions of the Gamgeoba (at best), cutting off their electricity so they could not broadcast, and even by damaging the equipment. In a case where two television companies both have no license but only one of them dares to take a critical line, the difference cannot lie in their level of independence. Instead, it lies in the fact that there are active non-governmental organizations in Akhaltsikhe, which were able to support the television station; furthermore, this company was lobbied by the New Rights party, which was in opposition to the governing party at the time (the Citizens' Union).

After the Revolution, a very interesting tendency developed in media-government relations. The owners of television channels, which used to actively oppose the former government, joined the 'National Movement' and local government structures which had previously tried to significantly influence the work of certain electronic media organisations. According to

local experts, they are no longer interested in reporting the district's problems and deal mostly with the Gamgeoba. Nonetheless, it should be noted that these organizations have still maintained some level of criticism. Representatives of the post-Revolution electronic media in Samtskhe-Javakheti explain their 'benevolence' towards the local government by saying 'they [the National Movement] have just come to power', 'Let's give them some time and we'll sort out our relationship later', etc.

## Media and Society

The degree to which citizens are informed about various issues in Samtskhe-Javakheti differs from district to district.

In Meskheti, where most of the population are ethnic Georgians, people get more news and are better informed about national issues than local problems, because they can watch the Tbilisi-based television channels *Imedi* and *Rustavi 2*. In Borjomi, Aspindza and Adigeni, many people do not know whether a local newspaper is published at all. In contrast, there is a great demand for newspapers from Tbilisi.

Unlike Meskheti, the public in Javakheti wants news covering a different geographical area. Local people are more interested in what is happening in Armenia than what is going on in Georgia. There are several reasons for this: the road transport infrastructure is in ruins and the region is isolated from other parts of Georgia; and for years, Tbilisi-based channels did not broadcast and Georgian newspapers were not distributed in Javakheti. During this period, people got used to Armenian television and newspapers printed in Armenia; the corrupt and ineffective regional administration (which was mainly staffed by ethnic Georgians) further decreased the Armenian-speaking population's level of trust in the government. This is also accompanied by having relations and emotional ties with neighbouring Armenia, though lately the situation has started to change: *Imedi* has started broadcasting in Javakheti; Akhalkalaki Television now broadcasts news bulletins from Tbilisi-based channels translated into Armenian, such as *Moambe (First Channel)* and *Kurieri (Rustavi2)*. A programme prepared as part of a regional project by Samtskhe-Javakheti's four TV companies, 'Paraleli', greatly facilitates the integration of the Georgian and Armenian populations. People realise that everyone in the region has the same problems, regardless of their ethnicity.

Newspapers are unable to inform the public about local problems because of their low circulation and low frequency of publication. This problem is resolved to some extent by non-governmental organisations. In their bulletins, they not only report on their own activities and inform people about their civil rights, but also write about local problems.<sup>7</sup>

Although theoretically the electronic media is more able to serve as an effective public source of information, to report in a timely fashion on things that are currently important, and to satisfy the various demands of a broad cross-section of society, its response has been very ineffective. Many electronic media organisations do not possess their own news teams, analytical or educational programmes. Most people's main sources of news are central Georgian and Armenian channels that are re-broadcast by local TV companies. Of course, this is not because local staff are unprofessional (Internews collaborates actively with them on this); first and foremost, it is caused by financial problems which mean that television companies cannot prepare their own programmes.

Both the print and electronic media in Samtskhe-Javakheti display a characteristically inadequate attitude towards local problems. As a result, there is low public trust in them, and people find alternative ways of getting and spreading information using their own channels, where facts are usually interpreted on the basis of rumours. When Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania and the then Minister of Internal Affairs, Giorgi Baramidze, visited Kumurdo on 11 April 2004 (Orthodox Easter), this 'self-information' and the regional media's indifference to the visit resulted in a confrontation between Armenians and Georgians after the meeting.<sup>8</sup>

All of the above indicates that the media in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region is poorly developed and the region's information space is not well defined.

## **Borjomi**

### **Newspaper *Borjomi***

*Borjomi* is the successor of a periodical founded by the District Committee of the Communist Party in 1931. In 1991 the newspaper was estab-

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<sup>7</sup> One example is the 'Civil Initiatives' bulletin published in Akhaltsikhe by the Union of Regional Initiatives for the Development of Democracy in Samtskhe-Javakheti.

<sup>8</sup> The Prime Minister's visit to Kumurdo was not reported by the media, and the local population interpreted his visit as an attack on Armenian holy places.

lished as a local government publication and remained in state possession until 1992, when political events of Georgia, a change in government and the subsequent administrative vacuum in the region resulted in a lack of funding, which 'made' its staff become independent. Since then, *Borjomi* has operated as a limited company and it is owned by a collective of journalists.

Most of the paper's finances come from income generated by subscribers. There are 1,600 subscribers. An annual subscription costs 10 lari. In addition, a subdivision of the newspaper called *Press Ltd* takes orders to print materials from district organisations. Some of the *Press Ltd*'s revenues are used to cover the newspaper's costs. The newspaper also receives significant funding from the local budget. On the basis of an agreement made with the Gamgeoba, *Borjomi* reports on the local government's activities (sessions of the Gamgeoba, decrees, and orders) in return for financial support (600-1,000 lari a quarter). The district budget also allocates \$15,000 for mass media services, 50% of which goes to *Borjomi*. Another source of income is money received from advertisements; mostly these are obituaries and congratulations, with only a small part of its income generated by commercials. Adverts cost from 5 to 10 lari and bring in a total of about 5,000-6,000 lari a year.

*Borjomi*'s stable situation was achieved by its present editor, Valerian Lomidze, who has a good relationship both with the Gamgeoba and local business circles. This is well demonstrated by the paper's way of working. There are few strongly critical articles, and most of the newspaper is devoted to articles about particular individuals. There is one page of news, but since the newspaper is published once a week it is not very topical. A lot of attention is paid to the government's campaign against illegal timber felling. A great deal of attention is also focused on important Orthodox holidays and dates, though not for other confessions. The newspaper also ignores the many cases of human rights violations.

The paper's office is equipped with a computer, a scanner, a printer and a camera, which the editor said were donated by sponsors. *Borjomi* has applied for funding several times from the Eurasia Foundation and the Open Society – Georgia Foundation, but has never won a grant.

*Borjomi* is printed on A2 format paper and contains six pages. The text is designed in Borjomi but is printed in Tbilisi. It has stable periodicity, coming out once a week. Its circulation is no larger than its number of

subscribers, with only an extra 20 copies being printed for retail sale (the retail price is 30 tetri). Its print run is thus 1,620. The newspaper's staff are in charge of its distribution themselves; they have divided the district villages into zones in which particular individuals are responsible for distributing the newspapers.

The newspaper has a staff of 15 people: an editor, a deputy editor, chief secretary, seven journalists, three camera operators, and two proof-readers. They also have volunteer reporters in some villages in the district.

From time to time, *Borjomi*'s staff also publish a school supplement, *Tsisarkela* (circulation 800-1,000, A2 format, four pages) and the *Newspaper of the National Park*, ordered by the administration of the Borjomi-Kharagauli National Park (circulation 500, A2 format, four pages).

### ***Borjomi TV Television Company***

*Borjomi TV* started operating in 1995. It immediately faced problems from criminal groups in the district (the 'Mkhedrioni'), who tried to take control of it. In 1997, the TV company was established as a commercial structure. It has three equal owners with 33% each and no government shares.

The channel mostly focuses on news and analysis programmes. *Borjomi TV* was financially and technically assisted to develop this direction with a grant from the Eurasia Foundation in 1999. *Internews* also helped them to acquire the skills necessary to prepare news bulletins (trainings for journalists, camera operators and editors). As a result of collaboration with these organisations, *Borjomi TV* has trained staff to prepare its own news, analytical programmes and talk shows. The channel broadcasts its talk shows live, and can therefore have direct telephone contact with the audience, which in turn generates interest among the audience and increases the channel's popularity. Two talk shows (political debates) are broadcast, 'The Theme' and 'The Forum'. They are normally broadcast during election campaigns, but are also prepared when very important events or issues occur. The company works with the local government, other political parties and non-governmental organisations for these programmes. News bulletins take up 30 minutes of airtime each day, from 20.30 to 21.00. All other time is used to re-broadcast programmes made by *Rustavi 2*. Together with other television companies in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Shida Kartli (*Parvana* television and radio company in

Ninotsminda; *Metskhre Arkhi/Imperia* television company in Akhaltsikhe; *ATV12* television company in Akhalkalaki; and *Dia* television company in Khashuri), *Borjomi TV* established the *Association of Media Development in Samtskhe-Javakheti*. The association is governed by *Borjomi TV*, and it initiated a project called 'Paraleli' which aims to share information among the partner organisations and prepare joint programmes. This project is implemented with funding from IREX. The greatest problem the project faces is communication difficulties; programmes are exchanged on video-cassettes. The organisations therefore want to operate a relay line, which would make it easier to exchange programmes and improve the effectiveness of their broadcasting. 'Paraleli' is currently on air only twice a week (on Tuesdays and Fridays).

The company's main source of income is grants from donor organisations. Like *Borjomi* newspaper, the television company has an agreement with the Gamgeoba to report its activities in return for a fee. The local budget also allocates \$15,000 for mass media services, 50% of which is intended for *Borjomi TV*. A relatively small amount of income is generated from announcements, which primarily consists of obituaries and congratulation messages. Commercials are very rare.

At present, *Borjomi TV*'s equipment consists of a DVD design table and two Super-VHS camcorders, two computers, a printer and a scanner. However, due to low voltage, most of its equipment is out of order.

*Borjomi TV* has a staff of twelve: a director, a technical director, an accountant, a designer, four journalists and four camera operators.

## **Akhaltsikhe**

### **Newspaper *Akhaltsikhe***

This newspaper has been published since 1993. It was founded as a private newspaper, but because local readers have weak purchasing power, the paper's editorial staff collaborate with the district Gamgeoba in order to maintain the newspaper. Currently, it depends wholly on subsidies from the district budget to operate. Of course, its financial dependence on the district Gamgeoba influences the paper's working style. It avoids publishing critical material and mainly focuses on articles about prominent people from the district, and occasionally comments on issues mentioned in local television broadcasts. The district Gamgeoba provides financial assistance



to the newspaper, but this aid is so small that the newspaper is still only published once a month (even this periodicity is not maintained because of problems with the district budget). Because it comes out so infrequently, emphasis is placed on news that is still relevant, and on the decrees and orders of the local government.

*Akhaltzikhe* does not possess any technical equipment. It is designed and printed in Tbilisi on A2 format paper. The newspaper has eight pages and a print run of 700 (most of which are distributed to subscribers from local government bodies). Its retail price is 50 tetri (the editor says that each copy costs 1.20 lari to print, however).

*Akhaltzikhe* has a staff of eight: a chief editor, two editors, two journalists, an accountant, a mail carrier and a cleaner.

### **Newspaper *Meskheta University***

This newspaper was founded in 1990 at the same time as the Akhaltzikhe branch of the Tbilisi Ivane Javakhishvili State University (TSU), and is the newspaper of the TSU Akhaltzikhe branch. It is financed by the University, and focuses entirely on university life; it pays little attention to social and political life in the region. However, it does reflect the whole range of social and political activities in which Akhaltzikhe University students are involved. For example, it reported student activities dedicated to students in Ajara. It pays a lot of attention to the professors, teachers, and students of the TSU Akhaltzikhe branch, and their guests. Before entrance exams it publishes tutorial tests, and from time to time it also prints different departments' academic curricula. The newspaper also devotes a lot of space to student life in Akhaltzikhe, especially to art and the success of its creative students.

Another source of income is money received from subscribers. *Meskheta University* has about 700 subscribers, most of which are university staff and students. The newspaper is thus distributed mainly among university people. Its print run is 1,000 copies, the rest of which is sold at retail or distributed to university students free of charge. It is prepared at the university's computer centre, but is then designed and printed in Tbilisi. It is published once a month, printed on A2 paper, consists of eight pages and has a retail price of 40 tetri. The newspaper has one full-time employee – the editor – who is provided with articles by volunteer students and university teachers.

## ***Lomsia Television Company***

*Lomsia* Television Company was founded in 1996 by four individuals. It broadcasts 24 hours a day, but is unable to fill its airtime with its own programmes, so it re-broadcasts *Rustavi 2* the rest of the time. Its own programmes are broadcast from 19.00 to 20.00 and 22.00 to 23.00 (news bulletins and analytical programmes). The television company was one of only two electronic media organisations in the whole region to possess a license (the other being *Borjomi TV*), but the National Communications Regulatory Commission annulled their license in summer 2005.

The channel operates in Akhaltsikhe and fully covers the whole district; however, it tries to give its audience information not only about the Akhaltsikhe district, but also to report on important issues from across the region. In particular, the channel has discussed problems in the education system in Akhalakali and Ninotsminda, considered problems relating to potable water in the Aspindza district, and reports regularly on illegal timber felling in the Adigeni district.

Before the Revolution, *Lomsia* had a very critical attitude towards the local government, and thus had limited access to public information; they received an official letter from the Gamgeoba banning the channel's journalists from attending Gamgeoba sessions and meetings. Currently, *Lomsia's* reporting is less critical; the staff explain this by saying that the new government has only just begun its activities. However, it reports actively on the government's personnel policies.

The television company collaborates with non-governmental organisations in Akhaltsikhe, such as the Union of Democrat Meskhs, The Universe, Former Political Prisoners for the Human Rights, and the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association.

The channel has the capacity to do live broadcasts, and its equipment consists of six camcorders (three digital and three VHS) and four computers (its reports are designed on the computer). The company employs 19 people: an executive director, a technical director, head of the news service, seven journalists, five camera operators, two anchors and two designers.

## ***9<sup>th</sup> Channel/Empire Television Company***

This television company was founded in 1996 but started broadcasting only in 1998. It has two owners (with shares of 67% and 33%). The channel broadcasts in three districts: Akhaltsikhe, Adigeni and Aspindza.

Most of the time it broadcasts programmes from Russian state television, with the 9<sup>th</sup> Channel's own programmes shown only at specific times. On Monday, the schedule is as follows: 'Dila Mshvidobisa' at 09.00; 'The Analytical Programme of the Week' at 10.00; 'Varskvlavebi', a children's programme, at 11.00; 'Moambe' (a news programme from the Central Georgian Television) translated into Armenian at 21.30; and the news bulletin 'Echo' at 22.00. On Tuesdays and Fridays the news bulletin 'Echo' is repeated at 10.00, and then at 22.00 it shows 'Echo' and 'Paraleli' (a programme which is the joint project of *Parvana* Television Company in Ninotsminda, *Borjomi TV* in Borjomi, *ATV 12* in Akhalkalaki and the 9<sup>th</sup> Channel/*Empire* in Akhaltsikhe). On Wednesdays and Thursdays the news bulletin 'Echo' is shown at 10.00 and 22.00, and sometimes there is also a programme called 'Business People'. On Saturdays there are political debates at 22.00 and on Sundays 'The Analytical programme of the Week' is broadcast at 22.00.

Before the Revolution, 9<sup>th</sup> Channel/*Empire* collaborated actively with the non-governmental organisation, The Union of Democrat Meskhs. It jointly prepared a programme with this organisation about illegal timber felling, and broadcast secret camera footage showing that officials (including the police) were involved in this activity. It also showed the film of a fight between the Gamgebeli (the head of the local government) of Akhaltsikhe and the mayor of the town, without any editing or comment. Following this critical coverage, the company was threatened and their accreditation was annulled by the Mayor's Office; there were no physical threats, however. The company's officials explained that the local government was afraid of the Broadcasting Network of Georgia, which comprises not only regional TV companies but also influential Tbilisi-based channels such as *Rustavi 2*.

The channel pays a lot of attention to religious groups, mostly the Orthodox, Catholic and Gregorian confessions.

Some 70% of the 9<sup>th</sup> Channel/*Empire*'s income comes from commercial advertisements (obituaries and congratulations). The company is also financially assisted by its founders.

Until recently, the channel broadcast without a license, but in May 2004 it was granted an eight-year broadcasting license.

The company's equipment consists of a digital camcorder, one Panasonic Super VHS and two VHS camcorders, fifteen video players and a computer. There is no design table, so it is designed using video players.

The 9<sup>th</sup> *Channel/Empire* has a staff of 21 people: an executive director, a technical director, head of the news service, three advertising agents, five journalists, four camera operators, three anchors, and three on-duty personnel.

## **Akhalkalaki**

### **Newspaper *Akunk***

*Akunk* (The Origin) has been published by the Akunk Association since 2002. The newspaper is not registered and this is its main problem, because this makes it impossible to get subscribers or to use Sakpress's (Georgian Press) distribution networks. Its operation depends entirely on individual contributions from association members. Nor is there any money for salaries. The people who run the newspaper work voluntarily, for the love of it.

The newspaper aims to report on the social and cultural life of the Armenian population of Javakheti. It enables the local intelligentsia to publish articles about the region's history and to discuss Javakheti's future. The newspaper also gives creative local people an audience for their poetry. The newspaper pays a lot of attention to government politics in the region and especially to its attitude towards the Armenian-speaking population.

During the November 2003 elections, the newspaper reported free of charge on two political parties' election campaigns: *Ertoba (Union)* and *Industry Will Save Georgia*. The editor says that he himself decided who to work with, considering whose interests and plans best corresponded to Javakheti's interests, and refused to allow other political parties to publish their materials. When the elections were re-run in 2004, *Akunk* refused to assist any political party at all.

A sort of forerunner to *Akunk* was the newspaper *Lern Ashkhar (Mtianeti)*, founded in Ninotsminda in 2001 with the participation of the Akunk Association, which closed down due to financial problems after only seven issues.

*Akunk* is edited, designed and printed in Yerevan on A2 paper and has four pages. It is published once a month. Its circulation ranges from 1,000 to 2,000 (its highest circulation was reached during the November 2003 elections). The newspaper is not sold and is distributed to people free of charge.

The Akunk Association's staff (a total of 35 people) are involved in running the newspaper, but only seven of them bear the direct responsibility, while the rest try to find material for the newspaper on their own initiative and enthusiasm. There is no structured editorial staff and job roles are not specified, with the exception of the editor and the typist.

### ***Javakhk/Areg* Television Company**

This television company was founded in 1990 by one individual who owns 100%. To begin with, all it did was re-broadcast the Central Television of Armenia, but little by little *Javakhk/Areg* developed as a commercial cable television station, though it has not attempted to make its own programmes. It broadcasts its own programmes every evening from 19.00 to 20.00, but this consists only of a 15-minute news bulletin, with the rest of the time devoted to announcements (mainly obituaries and congratulations). *Javakhk/Areg* does not broadcast any commercial advertisements: it used to show beer commercials, but its clients soon asked it to stop because representatives of the local government started to cause them trouble.

*Javakhk/Areg* currently serves 250 subscribers and provides 12 channels of broadcasting, and is thinking of adding six more. The subscription fee is 10 lari and is the company's main source of income.

*Javakhk/Areg* has no broadcasting license, which explains its loyal attitude towards the local government. The company has no desire to increase the scope or change the format of its news bulletin, as it is afraid that if it did so, the government would easily put down an unwanted opponent.

*Javakhk/Areg* collaborates with the Ozurgeti television channel *Madi*, which has helped it with technical equipment. It is also planning close cooperation with the Ninotsminda channel *Parvana*, which will involve preparing joint reports and bridges between the TV studios in the two districts.

Its technical equipment consists of its own TV mast, a radio transmission centre, a home-made design table, three video players, and a camcorder.

The company employs three people: a director, a journalist, and a camera operator, who is also in charge of design.

## **ATV 12 Television Company**

*ATV 12* was founded in 2000 by five individuals, but it now has only three owners. The name *ATV 12* was chosen because initially there were 12 employees. The channel broadcasts without a license, but despite this it has so far had no problems with the government. This has some influence on its working style. The channel was loyal towards the previous government, and the same can also be said concerning the new officials. It seems that the government can use the lack of a license as a way to exert pressure.

The channel broadcasts its own programmes for three hours a day from 20.00 to 23.00. Its journalists and editors still lack the necessary skills to prepare news bulletins, so *ATV 12* is unable to prepare programmes reflecting events taking place in Akhalkalaki.

At present, *ATV 12* re-broadcasts news bulletins from *Rustavi 2* and *The First Channel* translated into Armenian (the translation is done directly on site), which is very popular with the audience. This project is financed by Internews. The television company also participates in an information exchange among TV companies, i.e. it prepares reports for the programme 'Paraleli' (which *ATV 12* also broadcasts). The company has no source of income thus far, as there are no advertising orders and they themselves refuse to broadcast any announcements (i.e. obituaries and congratulations).

Its signal covers the Akhalkalaki district and also part of the Ninotsminda district.

*ATV 12*'s technical equipment consists of three video players, a design table, one big and one small digital camera, some TV sets, and a computer that is not connected to the Internet.

The company employs 12 people: a director, an editor, three translators, three camera operators, and four journalists.

## ***Akhalgazrduli Radio***

*Akhalgazrduli Radio* was founded by four individuals in 2001. To begin with the radio station had only a 1-Watt transmitter and it was difficult even to cover the whole of Akhalakalaki. This transmitter has now been replaced by a more powerful one, and its signal now covers the neighbouring villages as well.

Initially, the radio station re-broadcast the Russian radio station *Russkoe Radio*. Then, after two years of hard work by its staff, 12 programmes were prepared. Some of these have since closed, but some are still being

broadcast. These are mostly youth entertainment and educational programmes. The radio station does not deal with social issues. The creation of a news team was considered, but after a month and a half this project was stopped because of a lack of finances. The radio station is mostly aimed at an audience in the 14-30 age range. The most popular programme is an interactive music programme called 'Vecherni Zvonok' (Evening Bell). *Akhalgazrduli Radio* itself takes up six hours of airtime; the rest is filled by re-broadcasting the Russian radio station *Serebryanni Dozhd*.

Since the commercial market is very small, the radio station has no sources of income. Furthermore, because it has no license it is impossible to enter into a contract with either *Russkoe Radio* or *Serebryanni Dozhd* to get reimbursement for the service provided. Its creative work depends on the enthusiasm of its staff and their individual contributions. *Akhalgazrduli Radio* gets some support from the sports club called Jam and broadcasts advertisements for it free of charge.

The radio station is equipped with an interactive telephone, a microphone, two computers, two printers and a transmitter.

At present, 10 people work for the radio station. Decisions are made by a four-member council. The radio station has a director, a deputy director, two editors and six disc jockeys.

## **Ninotsminda**

### **Newspaper *Arshaluis***

*Arshaluis* is a descendant of the publication of the Communist Party District Committee. Its name used to be *Zaria* (Dawn). In 1991, it changed its name to *Arshaluis*.

The newspaper remains the newspaper of the district Gamgeoba and depends entirely for its existence on subsidies from the local district budget. Of course, this dependency is reflected in the radio station's working style. Mostly it reports on the activities of the Gamgeoba, and on the Gamgebeli himself. It also pays some attention to what is happening nationally, and also what is happening in Armenia. As a rule, the paper does not publish articles about political and ethnic confrontations. Even during elections the newspaper avoided publishing any political party's campaign material or information about it.

The newspaper collaborates with a Tbilisi-based Armenian newspaper, *Vrastan*; its editors provide articles to colleagues in Tbilisi about the social and cultural life of the Armenian population in the district.

The newspaper is not distributed on a retail basis; it has 500 subscribers and its whole circulation is for subscribers only. *Arshaluis*'s subscribers are schools and district government bodies, and it always receives its subscription fees on the day they are paid. For this reason, the newspaper sometimes faced publishing problems before the Revolution, since sometimes there were delays in paying salaries. It has no other source of income other than subscriptions and government subsidies.

*Arshaluis* has its own (Soviet-era) publishing house, but editing and designing there is very expensive, so it is edited and designed in the computer centre of the Akhaltsikhe branch of Tbilisi State University, and then printed in Armenia, which also increases its cost (the editor says it costs one lari per copy to prepare the paper, but the fixed price per copy is only 50 tetri).

*Arshaluis* is published monthly on A2 format paper. Articles are printed in the Armenian and Russian languages. It contains eight pages and has a circulation of 500 copies.

*Arshaluis* does not possess any technical equipment other than three old typewriters.

The newspaper employs six people: an editor, a typist, a proof-reader, two part-time employees and a guard.

### ***Parvana* Television and Radio Company**

*Parvana* was founded in 1990 by three individuals. In 1993, it closed down temporarily, and began broadcasting again only two years later. Although it is a private organisation with no government ownership, it is highly dependent on the local government: it began broadcasting again with the support of the Gamgeoba, and the Gamgebeli in particular. The Gamgeoba also resolved office problems, allocating a space free of charge. Currently, there are concerns that this building will be privatised.

Though *Parvana* is a television and radio company, it currently operates only as a television station. There were attempts to run a radio station, and some programmes were prepared, but due to a lack of finances it was limited to transmitting music. *Parvana* does not have its own programmes; it currently broadcasts the programme 'Paraleli', which is a joint project of



the television channels of the Association for Media Development in Samtskhe-Javakheti, and news bulletins from Tbilisi-based channels translated into Armenian: 'Moambe' from the *First Channel*, and 'Kurieri' from *Rustavi 2*. From time to time, *Parvana* broadcasts private programmes about famous people from the district (relating to anniversaries and the days they died), and also broadcasts news about guests to the town, and public and religious holidays. There are no commercials, only announcements (obituaries and congratulations).

Besides the abovementioned programmes (which occupy only six hours a day), its airtime is occupied by re-broadcasting the Russian channel NTV.

The channel refuses to report on election campaigns. During the elections in October 2003, they invited most candidates to be involved in political debates, but they refused to participate. During the presidential elections in January 2004, *Parvana* provided advertising for Temur Shashiashvili's pre-election campaign, Mikheil Saakashvili's opponent. Despite this, the channel failed to inform the people about the election campaign. According to local experts, it reported the 2004 elections so unprofessionally that local people thought the elections were a re-run of majoritarian parliamentary elections.

*Parvana* has received two grants from the OSCE (to repair its building and to purchase technical equipment) even though it does not have a broadcasting license. It also collaborates actively with Internews, which helps it to improve its staff's level of professionalism. A programme called 'Cross-road' is currently scheduled for broadcasting on *Parvana* under the aegis of Internews. The Gamgeoba helps the company to purchase, transport and fix its technical equipment.

*Parvana's* signal covers the Ninotsminda district and part of the Akhaltsikhe district. Its technical equipment consists of a computer, three video recorders, two camcorders (one digital), six TV sets, a design table and a transcoder.

## **Aspindza**

### **Newspaper *Literaturuli Meskheti***

This newspaper was founded in January 1999 by the Regional Writers' Union, the Foundation of the Shota Rustaveli Museum, and the Meskheti Branch of the State University. The paper mostly publishes historical and

ethnographical articles and folk art. Its authors are scientists and art lovers from different parts of Georgia. *Literaturuli Meskheti* mainly reflects Meskheti's history and its present-day life.

The newspaper is financially assisted by the district Gamgeoba and the Akhaltsikhe branch of Tbilisi State University. From a financial point of view, it receives a tiny amount of money from sales. *Literaturuli Meskheti* received a grant of \$5,000 from the Open Society – Georgia Foundation. Its circulation is 1,500 copies, 30% of which is distributed across Georgia (via Sakpresssa), while the other 70% is distributed locally.

The newspaper is printed on A2 paper. Its retail price is 40 tetri. The text is edited in Aspindza, but it is then designed and printed in Tbilisi.

The paper's technical equipment was purchased out of the Open Society – Georgia Foundation grant and consists of two computers, two printers and a scanner. It also has two dictaphones.

There are five people on *Literaturuli Meskheti*'s editorial board: an editor, a deputy editor and three board members.

### **Newspaper *Aspindza***

*Aspindza* is a descendant of the Soviet-era periodical of the District Committee of the Communist Party and has been published since 1933. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, ownership of the newspaper was partly transferred to the journalists, and it is now owned by the district Gamgeoba and a collective of journalists. The newspaper depends entirely on subsidies from the district budget totalling 2,500 lari a month to operate. Money received from selling the newspaper is used to cover its expenses, but it faces serious publication problems. Its main readers are employees of government bodies.

The newspaper is mainly focused on reporting the activities of the district Gamgeoba and reflecting the cultural and social life of the district. It pays a lot of attention to issues relating to the Orthodox Church and Orthodox holidays, and writes little about other confessions. In June 2003, local government representatives and groups of people stopped Jehovah's Witnesses from holding a congress in the district, but the newspaper did not write anything about this.

*Aspindza* is printed on A2 format paper; it consists of four pages, and has a circulation of 500. Its retail price is 30 tetri. The text is edited in Aspindza, but it is then designed and printed in Tbilisi. The newspaper

possesses no technical equipment. It employs five people: an editor, a deputy editor and three journalists.

## **Adigeni**

### **Newspaper *Ganakhlebuli Meskheti***

*Ganakhlebuli Meskheti* is a descendant of the publication of the Adigeni District Committee of the Communist Party, and has been published under this name since 1923. The newspaper remains the property of the district Gamgeoba, and according to its editor, this factor defines the paper's policy not to interfere in the public life of the district. The paper mostly focuses on the activities of the district Gamgeoba, and publishes its decrees and decisions. A small portion of the newspaper is devoted to events taking place in Georgia and across the world. There is also a column on famous people. The newspaper reports widely on working visits by the Cabinet members from Tbilisi to the district. It often publishes letters it receives concerning illegal timber felling in Adigeni.

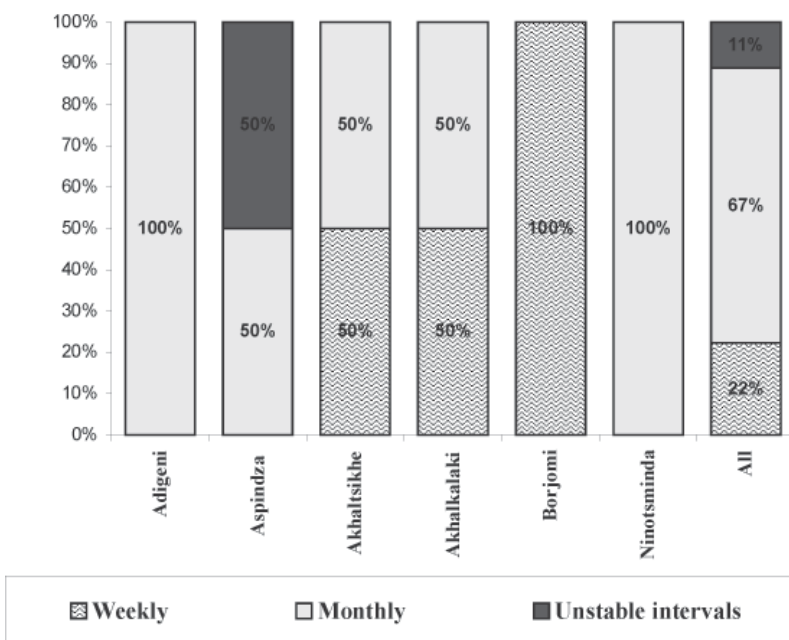
The newspaper is financed from the district budget. The amount of money received from sales is negligible. Only rarely are obituaries and congratulations published, and this is usually done free of charge.

The newspaper is printed on A2 paper and has four pages. It is published once a month with a circulation of 500 copies, and the retail price is 30 tetri.

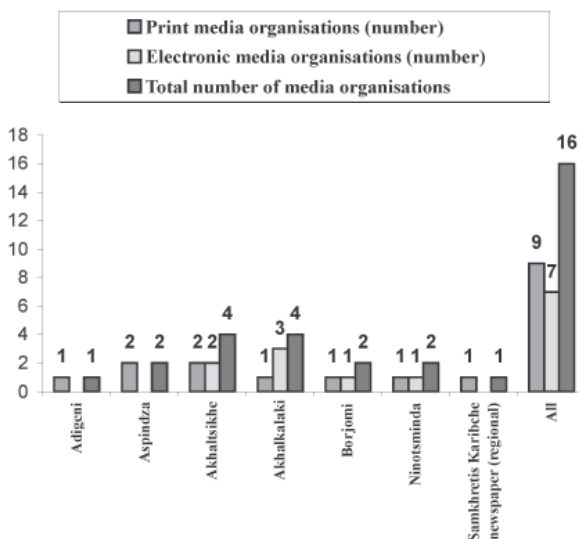
*Ganakhlebuli Meskheti* does not possess its own technical equipment. It is edited and designed at the computer centre of the Akhaltsikhe branch of Tbilisi State University and printed in Tbilisi.

*Ganakhlebuli Meskheti* employs three people: an editor, a deputy editor and a journalist.

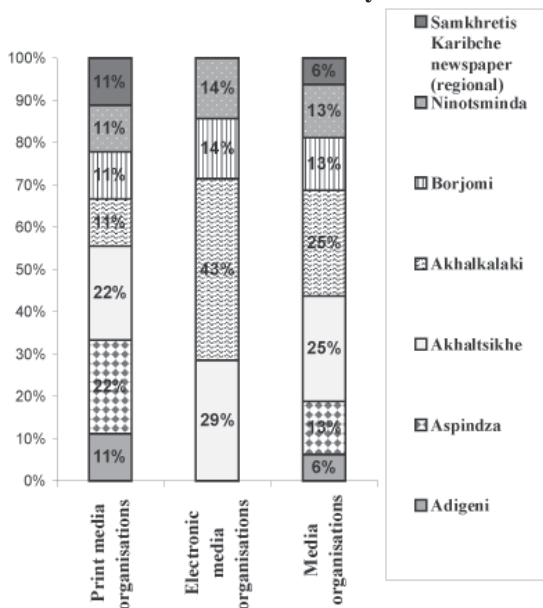
### Publication intervals of print media organisations in Samtskhe-Javakheti by district



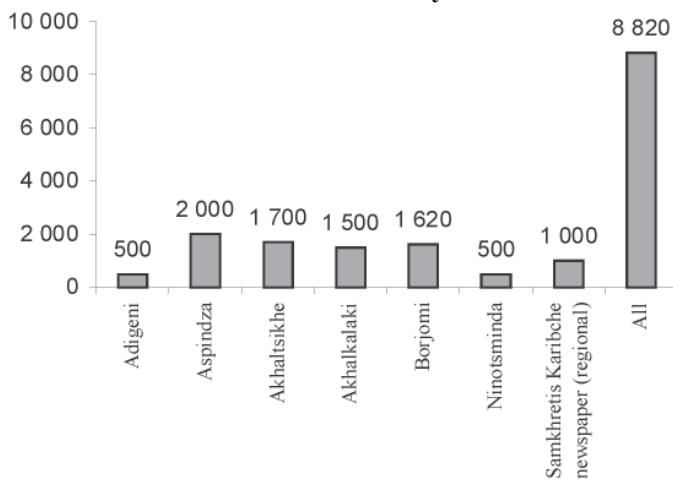
### Number of media organisations in Samtskhe-Javakheti by district



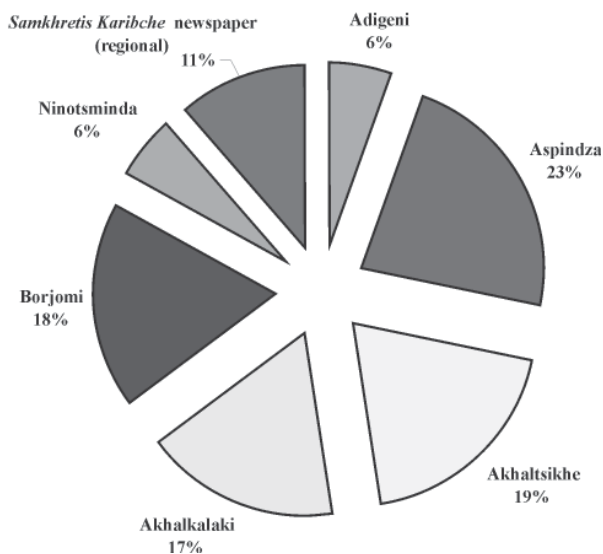
### Percentage distribution of media organisations in Samtskhe-Javakheti by district



**Overall circulation of print media  
in Samtskhe-Javakheti by district**



**Pie chart showing overall circulation of print media  
in Samtskhe-Javakheti by district**



## NEWSPAPER *SAMKHRETIS KARIBCHE* (THE SOUTHERN GATE)<sup>1</sup>

This newspaper was established in June 2004 within the framework of the project *Development of Regional Media in Georgia and Civil Accountability*. Initially the newspaper was registered as a limited company and its founders were The Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) (London/Tbilisi) with a share of 52%, and the Javakheti Association for Media Development (Akhalkalaki) and the Civil Centre of Samtskhe-Javakheti Initiatives (Akhaltzikhe) with 24% each. IWPR participated in operating the paper at this stage because it was on IWPR's initiative that a project was launched to establish a newspaper in Samtskhe Javakheti. IWRP provided financial and technical support to the newspaper for three years. It was expected that by then, the *Samkhretis Karibche* newspaper would have been ready for a financially independent existence, and IWPR planned to divide its shares into two equal parts and give them to the other two owners. The Javakheti Association for Media Development (Akhalkalaki) and the Civil Centre of Samtskhe-Javakheti Initiatives (Akhaltzikhe) would each have owned 50% of its shares. After considering conditions on the local market<sup>2</sup> in May-June 2005, the newspaper changed its form of ownership and became a non-governmental organisation, *Samkhretis Karibche*.

The editorial board of *Samkhretis Karibche* is located in two towns in Samtskhe-Javakheti: Akhaltzikhe and Akhalkalaki. The newspaper is currently supervised by the board of the *Samkhretis Karibche* Union, which involves four representatives from the Javakheti Association for Media Development and another four from the Civil Centre of Samtskhe-Javakheti Initiatives (Akhaltzikhe), and representative of IWPR, who coordinates the paper's editorial policy. IWPR also does this by providing financial and technical assistance to publish the newspaper, improve the qualifications of its journalists and editors, and providing quality control for the newspaper.

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<sup>1</sup> *Samkhretis Karibche* newspaper did not exist for the moment when CIPDD researchers visited the Samtskhe-Javakheti region. That is why this article is not a part of the Samtskhe-Javakheti chapter and stands separately in *Regional Media Map*.

<sup>2</sup> The local advertising and media production market provided no opportunities for the newspaper to become financially independent, so in order to ensure its stable operation in future, one of the best outcomes for *Samkhretis Karibche* would be to work out how to exist with the help of assistance from international donors and active participation in public sector activities.

The editorial boards in Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki are responsible for searching for news and reporting and analysing current events.

The newspaper is distributed in the districts of Akhaltsikhe, Akhalkalaki, Ninotsminda, and Borjomi (there are plans to distribute the newspaper in the Adigeni and Aspindza districts as well). Its distribution network was established on the efforts of the two founder organisations: the *Javakheti Association for Media Development* and the *Civil Centre of Samtskhe-Javakheti Initiatives*. Responsibility for distributing the paper is taken by members of these organisations, who are not directly involved in its preparation. The distributors get no salary for their work; instead they sell papers and get 50% of cost of each paper they sell thus reimbursing their own labour with the relevant share of the money received from sales. This approach motivates distributors to increase their distribution area and the number of papers they sell.

This principle attracts and motivates distributors. The newspaper is also actively engaged in attracting subscribers, advertising the paper on the local television channel. The fact that there is no proper postal service at the moment means that *Samkhretis Karibche*'s editors have no chance of increasing the number of subscribers or enlarging its distribution area, so the newspapers are only sold in kiosks and shops.

*Samkhretis Karibche*'s editorial boards try to report effectively on the most problematic issues in the region (the paper is published once a week). It pays a lot of attention to local news (events going on in the districts of Akhaltsikhe, Akhalkalaki, Borjomi, Adigeni, Aspindza, and Ninotsminda); highlights the activities of the local government and non-governmental organisations, and reports on the environmental situation in the region. The newspaper analyses the crime situation in these districts and relevant police actions. The newspaper stands out for its criticism of the local government, and acts in a very balanced way, also publishing the positions of opposition parties. This was something new for the local media, which was largely defined by the local government, so readers were interested in this paper from the very beginning. This was clearly revealed by *Samkhretis Karibche*'s sales figures and by the many letters of support, requests and comments addressed to the newspaper. It may be stated that the newspaper is the only media organisation in Samtskhe-Javakheti's regional print media which functions as a forum and is ready to discuss any public problem and present any position.

The newspaper often publishes materials from other regional newspapers which participate in the *Development of Regional Media in Georgia and Civil Accountability* project (*Khalkhis Gazeti* in Gori, *Batumelebi* in



Batumi, *Akhali Gazeti* in Kutaisi, and *Spectrum* in Gurjaani) and from newspapers published under the aegis of IWPR (Panorama in Tbilisi/Sokhumi; CRS (Caucasus Resource Service), IWPR's electronic journal).

*Samkhretis Karibche* has a print run of 1,000 (500 in Georgia, 500 in Armenian). It is printed on A3 paper and consists of eight pages. It is published once a week. It is edited and designed in Akhaltsikhe, but is then printed in Tbilisi, and has a retail price of 30 tetri.

The newspaper's technical equipment consists of<sup>3</sup>:

In Akhaltsikhe:

- Three computers (two of which belonged to the *Civil Centre of Samtskhe-Javakheti Initiatives* and the third was donated by the IWPR Tbilisi office);
- A scanner
- A printer
- A digital camera
- Three dictaphones
- A car (hired)
- A power generator.

In Akhalkalaki:

- A computer (donated by the IWPR Tbilisi office),
- A scanner
- A printer
- A digital camera
- Three dictaphones (two for reporters in Akhalkalaki and the third for the reporter in Ninotsminda)
- A car.

*Samkhretis Karibche* employs an executive director (currently the executive director's duties are performed by a representative of the IWPR Tbilisi office), two chief editors (one for the Georgian version and one for the Armenian version), a designer, two translators, 14 journalists (two of which are photo-reporters), and two drivers.

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<sup>3</sup> Initially, when the newspaper was established as a limited company, the founding parties listed the newspaper's technical equipment and property, and ownership of this property was defined according to their share of the company. After *Samkhretis Karibche* was registered as a union, the old owners handed over their property to the union; the people responsible for running the newspaper do not own its property.

## KVEMO KARTLI<sup>1</sup>

Kvemo Kartli represents 8.8% of the total area of Georgia and 11.3%<sup>2</sup> of the total population. Kvemo Kartli's macroeconomic indicators (GDP index 0.48) rank it in seventh place out of eleven regions of Georgia.

population <sup>3</sup>						
	total	Georgian	Azeri	Armenian	Greek	other
<b>Kvemo Kartli</b>	<b>497 530</b>	<b>222 450</b>	<b>224 606</b>	<b>31 777</b>	<b>7 415</b>	<b>11 282</b>
Rustavi	116 384	102 151	4 993	2 809	257	6 174
Bolnisi	74 301	19 926	49 026	4 316	438	595
Dmanisi	28 034	8 759	18 716	147	218	194
Marneuli	118 221	9 503	98 245	9 329	396	748
Tetritskaro	25 354	18 769	1 641	2 632	1 281	1 031
Tsalka	20 888	2 510	1 992	11 484	4 589	313
Gardabani	114 348	60 832	49 993	1 060	236	2 227

### The Specific Features of the Region and their Influence on Media Development in Kvemo Kartli

The economics and infrastructure of Kvemo Kartli was diversely developed during the Soviet period:

- Rustavi, the administrative centre of the region, was one of the largest centres of heavy industry in Georgia and still has the same importance;
- In the Bolnisi district, there is a developed infrastructure for the extraction and processing of minerals, and for agricultural production;
- Marneuli, Tetritskaro, Dmanisi and Tsalka districts possess serious potential for agricultural production;
- As well as agricultural potential, Dmanisi and Tetritskaro districts possess serious potential for developing the tourism infrastructure.

Despite these existing capacities, the clan system of management established during Mamaladze's rule, which was based on corruption and criminal agreements between narrow regional elites and the political-economic

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<sup>1</sup> This study of the Kvemo Kartli region was held on 7-11 June 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Results of the 2002 census // State Department of Statistics. Tbilisi 2002.

<sup>3</sup> The distribution of permanent residents according to specific nationalities in the scope of administrative territory (regions), towns and districts // State Department of Statistics. Tbilisi 2002.

elites in Tbilisi, not only impeded development, but even caused the decay of the present infrastructure. Such a system is of course very sensitive to open management and transparency. For the whole decade the local government thus tried to:

- Impede any build-up of information or public discussion; civil sector development in the region was also subject to threats and direct mechanisms of influence;
- Impede the existence of other channels as alternatives to state information sources, which would enable the civil sector to structure the public space.

In this environment, reasoning from the interests of the local government, the state intervened in the activities of semi-independent or legally independent media organisations.

As well as the efforts of the local and central governments, of course, there were a whole range of other factors that also impeded the development of the sustainable media in the region:

- The destruction of the economic infrastructure resulted in social poverty, and this has an impact on the consumption priorities of society. For most people, it is more important to satisfy their specific daily needs than to buy a newspaper and get information;
- The fact that the media is run by the government and business circles close to them generates public distrust towards sources of information in the region. This is clearly reflected in levels of consumption for these media.

The region is very diverse from an ethnic and religious point of view. It is mainly populated with Muslim Azeris, Orthodox and Muslim Georgians, Gregorian Armenians and Orthodox Greeks. Nevertheless, the Kvemo Kartli region was for years considered to be more or less stable in comparison to other ethnic enclaves in Georgia. Ethnic and religious factors have played an important role in media development in Kvemo Kartli. As a rule, the media, which belongs to the state and is under its control, avoids problems which have ethnic or religious roots. This in turn generates distrust among these groups and causes alienation towards the state more generally. For this reason, there are strong informal channels for generating and transmitting information, and rumours and gossip deepen these groups' opposition to the state by spreading various phobias and stereotypes. This of course has an impact on local society's attitudes towards the media, which are characterised by low interest and a high degree of distrust.

The demographic picture in the region in some way reflects the local media's language policies. State-owned print media are published in Azeri and Georgian or Georgian and Russian (Marneuli, Tsalka); independent organisations in Marneuli use Azeri. Dmanisi and Bolnisi are exceptions in this regard, because although there is a significant Azeri population the local semi-governmental or completely governmental newspapers are published only in Georgian.

### **Differences within the Region by Town**

Rustavi and Marneuli stand out as having the most media organisations, with four in each town. The fact that there are not many media organizations in Kvemo Kartli administrative centre can be explained by the following:

1. For years, Mamaladze's rule hindered the development of the independent media in the region in general, and particularly in the administrative centre.
2. Rustavi is located so close to Tbilisi, the capital of the country, that the local population preferred to use the media from the capital, which they trusted more and found more interesting.

Of the existing four media organisations, one is a television company and the other three are newspapers. In previous years, there were several attempts to found an independent newspaper. At different times, the following newspapers were published for short periods: *Rustavi Today* and *Rustavi Info*, financed by a grant from the American Embassy. Neither of them could survive on the local media market because of complicated relationships with the local government and weak management.

There are a relatively larger number of media organisations in Marneuli because:

1. Most of the district population does not speak the state language and there is a big demand for information in a language they can understand
2. Society particularly wants information on issues such as Georgia's national policy towards the Azeri population, the Council of Europe's attitude towards Georgia on ethnic minority issues and on religious, Islamic issues, which in general is not treated either in the regional nor national press.
3. Unlike other Azeri-populated districts, organisations defending Azeri rights are better developed in the Marneuli district. These organizations naturally need means to transmit their own positions and ideas.

In Marneuli, all four media organisations are print media.

The town with the next largest number of media organisations is Bolnisi, with three media organisations. Bolnisi is the leader in the region with regard to electronic media, since two television channels broadcast in the town.

In other district centres in Kvemo Kartli (Gardabani, Tsalka, Tetrtskaro, and Dmanisi) the media is weakly developed and as a rule is represented by only one newspaper. No attempt has been made to develop the electronic media in these districts.

The disproportionate number of media organisations in certain towns is also because the road infrastructure between several towns and Tbilisi is very poor. It is vitally important for media organisations to have good connections with the capital because no necessary conditions exist to allow them to function *in situ*. This is particularly true of the print media.

Differences between media organisations in these towns can be observed not only in their degree of independence, but also in the direction of their activities. Of course, no media organisation in the region is completely independent and all of them have some record of loyalty to the local government; nonetheless, differences are still present.

Some organisations in Marneuli and Bolnisi stand out in this regard.

Particular mention should be made of *XII Channel* in Bolnisi, which suffered for broadcasting the events that took place before and during the elections of November 2003 and briefly afterwards. This refers in particular to a programme about the environmental situation in Bolnisi that was not very pleasant for the regional government. Its office was robbed several times (local experts believe this was related to the company's activities, but the investigation makes no such link), and there were court disputes regarding the building's property rights (the case was resolved in the TV company's favour). Today, *XII Channel* is in a very poor situation. It is likely that this media organisation will also become dependent on financial aid from the local Gamgeoba, and this will undoubtedly influence its style of working.

The weakness of the local non-governmental sector in the Kvemo Kartli region is also due to the fact that despite assistance provided by international organisations (i.e. Internews) it is difficult for the local media to maintain its independence.

## Print Media

There are a total of eleven print media organisations in the region<sup>4</sup>. Only one of them does not focus on civil and political matters. Only one out of eleven newspapers is completely independent since it entirely depends on the finances of the founder, and the founder has neither political, nor business interests (see below: Marneuli *Borchaloeli Mola* (*A Mullah from Borchalo*)). Five of the other ten papers are privately owned (one of them – *Rustavis Azoti* – has corporate ownership); one belongs to a private person and was co-founded by the government; the other five belong completely to the government.

It is very difficult to argue about the real level of dependence of the officially independent newspapers, since they exist either with the financial assistance of Gamgeoba or are considered to belong to groups with political interests. In order to survive (their circulation is very small and sales are minimal), the newspapers have to enter into similar agreements. In such cases the Gamgeoba assists the editorial staff not only by providing direct financing, but indirectly as well. For example, it helps them get subscribers (they order village Sakrebulo or other offices to subscribe to the newspaper), or provides subsidies for office rent or electricity payments. Newspapers that receive external financing are frequently distributed free of charge. This practice occurs particularly during elections, though some newspapers which represent political interests are distributed totally free. In such cases, it is rather difficult to talk about a balanced reporting policy or the objectivity of the newspapers' editors.

As a rule, most newspapers published in Kvemo Kartli come out once a month, or, very seldom, twice a month or once a week. This is because the editors face financial problems. These same financial problems mean that they can not even maintain this regularity, and often the newspaper is not published for months. In an environment with such low periodicity, it is impossible to provide up-to-date information and the newspaper becomes uninteresting, and the articles that are published are about events that are already long gone. In order to make it more interesting to the public, therefore, more space is given over to publicising upcoming events. Because

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<sup>4</sup> The list does not include the *Bulletin of the Information Centre of the Rustavi Local Government*, which cannot be considered a media organisation, though the bulletin published by the Centre helps to fill the information gap that exists due to the low level of media development in the town.

they do not come out very often, the newspapers lose orders to place announcements. Clients prefer to take advertisements and announcements to the television, which broadcasts the information to the audience much more quickly.

The circulation of newspapers published in the region ranges from 500 to 1,000 copies. The newspaper with the largest circulation, (2,500 copies) is *Azoti*, the newspaper of the Rustavi business Kimbochko, which belongs to the Russian company Itera. However to a large extent this is an exception to the rule in the Georgian regional press. One of the biggest problems faced by Kvemo Kartli newspapers is the absence of publishing facilities. There is a publishing house in Rustavi, but its capacity does not satisfy even the needs of local newspapers, so regional newspapers carry out the full publishing cycle in Tbilisi. Newspapers in Dmanisi and especially Tsalka face very big problems in this regard because of destroyed roads and poor transport infrastructure.

## **Electronic Media**

Unlike the print media, the electronic media in Kvemo Kartli is poorly developed. There are only three television channels in the region. Two of them are independent and represent private broadcasting companies. The third, Bolnisi-based TV company *V Channel*, was initially founded by private individuals, but became state property after the events that took place before and after the Rose Revolution (see below: Bolnisi, *V Channel*). There was an independent television channel in Marneuli before the Revolution, but it became a branch of the *Kvemo Kartli TV-Radio Company* (Rustavi) after its founder was arrested.

It is very difficult to argue that these legally independent TV companies have any real degree of independence. They mostly serve business interests in their attitude towards the local government. Roughly speaking, business people who founded TV companies did so in order to use the media to make deals with the Government. The exception in this regard was perhaps the Bolnisi TV company *XII Channel*.

The main problem faced by TV companies in Kvemo Kartli is their inability to create their own revenue because of the absence of a local advertising market. For this reason, TV companies depend on funding from their founders, or in worse cases, on that of the local Gamgeoba. The only income-generating service is the broadcast of obituaries and congratulation

messages. In this, the electronic media rivals the print media because its service is faster. The revenue received from such activities is still insufficient to allow the TV company to function perfectly. The financial and technical problems faced by these TV companies could be overcome with the help of grants from international organisations, but so far none of them have received any such grants.

## **Media and Government**

Looking at the general picture, the relationship between the regional media and the government could in no way be said to be one of conflict. Given the present financial relationships, the media was unable to oppose the Government before the Revolution and has failed to do so even since then. Moreover, they actually tended to get closer to the Government after the Rose Revolution. Newspapers and TV companies themselves ask for government patronage. Paradoxical as it may sound, the board of *V Channel* in Bolnisi decided to become state-owned on its own initiative, which is not hard to understand from a financial point of view. In an environment when no social-economic conditions exist that could allow the independent media to exist, state patronage is associated with a permanent, stable source of income.

Another negative impact of the Rose Revolution on the regional media is the fact that the new government seems interested in maintaining the old situation, and shows the same attitude towards the media as was usual during the Mamaladze administration. In particular, there are so-called “forbidden topics” that the media should not touch. These are: the current environmental situation and related cancerous diseases in the Bolnisi district; the damage<sup>5</sup> caused to citizens by the actions of BP and ethnic problems in Tsalka District<sup>6</sup>; and protests by the Azeri population in Marneuli and Gardabani.

## **Media and Society**

As outlined above, society’s trust in the local media is very low. Media organisations that depend on the interests of the government and business-

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<sup>5</sup> Because of unforeseen mistakes during construction, there are many cases in the town of Tsalka where homes and gardens become flooded when it rains hard.

<sup>6</sup> Issues relating to unpaid compensation for the safety of citizens who migrated from mountainous Ajara and for the homes of local Greeks have not been settled.



men alienate media consumers. Readers cannot read about the things in which they are interested in the newspapers. As a result, the papers have such a low circulation that they are aimed only at permanent readers: employees of the Gamgeoba and regional offices.

The television audience is larger because of the nature and capabilities of television. The local audience is interested in films and soap operas re-broadcast from other TV companies and recorded on unlicensed cassettes, but interest in local news programmes is very low. As a rule, the local TV companies do not have their own programmes.

The Georgian-speaking audience gets information about current events in the country from programmes broadcast by *Imedi* and the *First Channel* on State Television. The Azeri population, meanwhile, gets its news from Azeri broadcasting companies.

The Marneuli branch (the former TV company *Algeti*) of the *Kvemo Kartli TV-Radio Company* has started broadcasting the news programme *Moambe* from *The First Channel*, translated into Azeri, which has aroused great interest among the Azeri population. The *Kvemo Kartli TV-Radio Company* is going to create a cycle of Azeri programmes and programmes focused on learning the state language.

## **Rustavi**

### **Newspaper *Rustavi***

The history of this newspaper begins when Rustavi was assigned city status. It has existed since 1944 and has been published under various different titles. Initially, its name was *Mza Metalurgi* and it was published in Russian. In 1948, it was renamed *Socialist Rustavi* and was published in Russian and Georgian. After 1991, when an alliance of parties, Independent Georgia – Mrgvali Magida headed by Zviad Gamsakhurdia, came to rule, *Socialist Rustavi* – as an official publishing body of the city government – changed its name and has since been published under the name *Rustavi*.

Before 1998, the newspaper was state property and was on the state books. Today the newspaper is privately owned, it is registered as a limited company and is an independent periodical. The newspaper has three founders with an equal share of 33% each.

The newspaper *Rustavi* faces serious financial problems. Being an independent periodical, it has to finance itself from its own revenues. How-

ever, apart from revenues received from selling papers and publishing advertisements, the newspaper receives serious assistance based on an agreement with the local government to promote the activities of the city Gangeoba. The local government also provides assistance by attracting subscribing organisations (city government organisations, schools, and businesses). Despite this assistance from government, the newspaper lacks finances. Because of financial problems, the paper's editorial staff often turn to local businessmen for assistance in order that they do not fail to publish the planned issue. The editors still do not always get assistance, which is why sometimes the periodicity of the newspaper is not maintained and an issue is delayed. The newspaper has never received funds from international organisations or foundations. The newspaper *Rustavi* has no building to house its editorial staff. The building they had in the Soviet era and their publishing house has been sold by auction. Today, the newspaper's editors rent necessary office space in a hotel building.

*Rustavi* contains the following columns: politics, economics, history, society, sports and culture.

Politically, most analytical articles published in the newspaper reflect events taking place in the capital; the newspaper publishes the decrees and resolutions of the Mayor's Office and city Sakrebulo in accordance with the abovementioned agreement. Since the newspaper is not published throughout the region and has no financial and technical means to gather information about events taking place in other districts of Kvemo Kartli, the situation existing elsewhere in the region is not discussed on its pages.

From an economic point of view, articles published in the newspaper relate mainly to economic infrastructure and the existing social situation in Rustavi.

The newspaper's editors try not to aggravate their relationship with the local government. There is therefore little critical material towards the city or regional government. Civil society groups are not given an equal opportunity to state their positions in the newspaper. For example, the paper made mention of disagreements between Jehovah's Witnesses and Orthodox communities, but showed interest towards only one party to the conflict.

The newspaper's technical equipment consists of one out-of-date computer, a scanner and a printer. The text is typed and designed on site. Until January 2004, the newspaper was printed in Tbilisi, but it is now published in Rustavi.

The newspaper *Rustavi* is printed on A3 format; it consists of eight pages and is issued once a week. It has a circulation of 1,000 copies and this number decreases to 800 in the summer. 300 copies are distributed to subscribers; the rest to retailers. The retail price is 40 tetri.

The newspaper *Rustavi* has a staff of seven people: an editor, an executive secretary, a proof-reader, three journalists and a designer. The newspaper cannot afford to employ any new personnel, so it is staffed with journalists who used to work for the old *Socialist Rustavi*.

### **Newspaper Azoti**

This newspaper has been published since 1971, initially under the name *Kimikosi*. It was given the name *Azoti* in 2001.

The newspaper was founded by the Kimbochko enterprise and functions on the basis of finances provided by this company. The paper was not published in 1999-2000, when the company faced serious financial problems and a privatisation process was underway. After 2001, when the government handed the factory over to the Russian company Itera, the newspaper began publication again under a new name.

Initially, the newspaper was right across the city of Rustavi, but after the Kimbochko factory was handed over to Itera, the new management decided to reduce the amount of money it gave to the newspaper, and today it is distributed only among factory employees. There are about 3,000 workers at the factory, so the circulation is approximated to this number and is 2,500 copies. The newspaper is distributed to factory workers free of charge.

The newspaper's editors do not represent an organisationally separate structure from the factory administration. The editorial personnel belong to the factory's press service and receive salaries as employees of this department. Correspondingly, the newspaper reflects the position of the factory administration regarding disputes with professional unions and local governmental structures. Consequently, material published in the newspaper is really under the control of the factory management. When the newspaper is ready for publishing, it is prepared first for approval by the company administration and is then delivered to the publishing house after comments have been made and the issue has been finalised.

The newspaper mostly contains information about the activities of the factory administration and the lives of its workers, and also tries to reflect

their social issues; it also publishes materials dedicated to famous workers and to heroes of socialist labour. Articles are also written in response to critical reports about 'Itera' in the local or capital press. When there was a conflict recently in Rustavi between the orthodox community and Jehovah's witnesses, the newspaper could not avoid religious themes and actively defended the position of the Orthodox community; it has also written about the Rose Revolution and events that took place in the autonomous republic of Ajara in May 2004.

*Azoti* is published once a week. Previously it consisted of 12 pages, but now it has eight pages and is printed on A4 format paper. Six of its eight pages are dedicated to the factory and the activities of its administration. The newspaper has a publishing house that belongs to the factory<sup>7</sup>.

### **Newspaper *Chveni Gazeti* (Our Newspaper)**

This newspaper was established last year with the efforts of the Rustavi Foundation for Development and Revival, and is considered one of the components of this organisation's youth programme. The foundation tried to publish the newspaper in 2003, but was unable to pursue this initiative due to financial problems. It then started publishing *Chveni Gazeti* in autumn 2004.

The first, trial issue of the *Chveni Gazeti* was published in June 2004. Currently, the paper is not legally a separate institution; rather it is affiliated to the Rustavi Foundation for Development and Revival. It is therefore financially dependent on grants from this organisation.

The newspaper is aimed at educating young people and mainly writes about youth problems and issues they are interested in. The material published in this newspaper is very general and does not focus on any particular problems faced by the youth of Rustavi. For example, the problems of drug-abuse and prostitution are widely covered, but almost nothing is said about the scale of the problem in Rustavi itself – more attention is paid to the psychological and social aspects of the issue. The paper also has entertainment pages. It also pays attention to religion. As one of the newspaper's staff pointed out, since the Rustavi population is Orthodox, the paper contains articles comparing Orthodoxy to other religions, but its objective is

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<sup>7</sup> It is unknown how many staff or what technical equipment *Azoti* has because the representative of the newspaper interviewed refused to give this information to Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development researcher.

not to promote this religion but simply to educate its readers. According to this staff member, the newspaper has blessing of the local eparchy to publish religious articles.

The newspaper is still just being established, so it does not yet have a full editorial staff. There are only four people on the editorial board. The newspaper does not employ journalists. Stories are provided by young people employed by the mass media department of the Rustavi Foundation for Development and Revival. The foundation's management also helps to coordinate the editing.

The newspaper does not have its own technical equipment. Its editorial board is located at the Rustavi Foundation for Development and Revival and uses the foundation's equipment. The text is edited and designed locally, but printed in Tbilisi.

The paper has a circulation of 1,000 copies; it consists of eight pages and is printed on A3 format paper. It is published once a week. Its retail price is 50 tetri.

### ***Bulletin of the Information Centre of the Rustavi Local Government***

The Rustavi Information Centre was established in August 2003 with money provided by the Swiss Agency for Development and the Eurasia Foundation, and was founded in Rustavi as part of a network of analogous centres in other cities (Signagi, Lagodekhi, Telavi, Gori, Kutaisi, Zestaponi, Lanchkhuti, Ambrolauri, Rustavi). The Centre's activities are focused on making public information available to citizens, and also on providing the Government with information about the problems faced by society.

*The Bulletin of the Information Centre* was first published in October 2003 and is intended to support the Centre achieve its goals. The bulletin publishes decrees and resolutions issued by the local government, and provides information on a wide range of issues, including the activities of the local government and on various utility tariffs.

*The Bulletin of the Information Centre* studies how far the public is interested in one or another problem by conducting social surveys; each subsequent edition of the bulletin is dedicated to the most important issue or issues identified by the survey. The Information Centre informs the local government about the results of the survey, which allows the latter to learn more about prevailing attitudes in local society.

As well as publishing the bulletin, the Information Centre arranges public meetings where people can meet government representatives, in order to ensure that the information is really public and available to citizens. These meetings are publicised both by the *Bulletin of the Information Centre* and on local television.

*The Bulletin of the Information Centre* is published once a fortnight, consists of eight pages and is printed in A4 format. It is designed locally. The Bulletin's circulation is 2,000 copies, and it is distributed to the public free of charge. The *Bulletin* does not have a separate editorial staff. Five people are responsible for running it.

### ***TV-Radio Company of Kvemo Kartli***

The joint-stock society *TV-Radio Company of Kvemo Kartli* was established in 1998. It was founded by three private individuals, each of whom had equal shares. However, some time later one of the founders bought out the other two's shares and today the TV company is associated with the name of local businessman Roman Mgaloblishvili.

According to the license issued by the National Communications Regulation Commission, the company can broadcast in Marneuli, Bolnisi, Rustavi and Tbilisi, but because it lacks suitable material and technical capacity, it only broadcasts in Rustavi. The company has an office in the district centre of Kvemo Kartli (Rustavi) and a branch in Marneuli, which broadcasts in Marneuli with its on-air network.

From a legal point of view, the status of the Marneuli branch of the TV Company was for some time ambiguous. The Marneuli branch of the *TV-Radio Company of Kvemo Kartli* used to operate as a separate TV company, *Algeti*, which broadcasted independently of the Rustavi office, developed its own on-air network, prepared its own programmes and, correspondingly, had its own news policy. The Marneuli TV company *Algeti* was associated with the name of Badri Supatashvili, a local businessman who was the director of Sadakhlo market and the TV company's functioning depended on his funding. After the Rose Revolution, the arrest of Badri Supatashvili created financial and legal problems for *Algeti*. The company stopped broadcasting, and at that point the new management of the *TV-Radio Company of Kvemo Kartli* (the owner was not changed after the Revolution, but the management was replaced and the company was reorganised) raised the issue of the Marneuli branch of the TV company.

Badri Supatashvili gave his share of the company to Roman Mgaloblishvili and *Algeti* has now been merged with the *TV-Radio Company of Kvemo Kartli*.

Although a large proportion of the population in Kvemo Kartli region is Azeri-speaking, the TV company does not broadcast in the Azeri language. This is explained in part by the fact that the company cannot cover the areas of Marneuli, Gardabani, Dmanisi, Tsalka or Bolnisi, where there are large, compact Azeri populations. The Marneuli branch of the TV company, like the independent TV company *Algeti*, used to broadcast the *Moambe* news programme from the *First Channel of Georgia State Television* translated into Azeri. This agreement between *Algeti* and the *First Channel of State Television* did not hold the parties to any financial costs. The management of the *TV-Radio Company of Kvemo Kartli* requested that the Marneuli branch should pay for broadcasting *Moambe*.

Financially, the *TV Radio Company* is operating in difficult conditions. The joint stock society cannot start radio broadcasting and in fact is only a TV company.

Before the Revolution, the main source of income was on-air time sold to the local government. The company's new management is trying to establish contacts with other TV companies, particularly in the capital, in order to get the material assistance necessary to undergo a technical reorganisation. They are also attempting to cooperate with international foundations – a proposal was submitted to the IREX Foundation concerning technical assistance.

The company's programmes are not very diverse and there is no real established on-air network. News programmes are broadcast on a daily basis and occupy 25-30 minutes of air time. These programmes are not very critical. In this respect, there is little difference between how the television station was before the Revolution and how it is now.

The *TV-Radio company's* technical equipment consists of: two cars, four video cameras, a digital editing table (damaged), video recorders, TV sets, and its own tower.

After the reorganisation, the company was left with 15 employees: a director, a technical director, four camera operators, four journalists, two drivers, a designer and an accountant.

## **Marneuli**

### **Newspaper *Akhali Marneuli* (New Marneuli)**

The newspaper has been published since 1930. In 1965, the newspaper was renamed *Akhali Marneuli* and was published in Georgian and Azeri until 1991.

The newspaper is still state property and is subordinate to the Gamgeoba. The newspaper thus depends on financing from the local government to operate. 1,000 laris are allocated from the local budget each month to publish the newspaper, but quite often the Gamgeoba finds it hard to provide this money. Hence, *Akhali Marneuli* is sometimes not published for as long as six to seven months due to insufficient funds. The newspaper has no other income. An insignificant amount of revenue is generated from publishing congratulations and obituaries.

Since it is a government-owned newspaper, it does not have very diverse content. The majority of published articles are dedicated to the activities of the local government and representatives of the district Gamgeoba or city hall, also to people who are well known in the district. The newspaper has old, Soviet levels of inertia and is not interesting for society to read. It is thus difficult to sell the paper, and it has a low circulation.

*Akhali Marneuli* contains four pages, it is printed on A4 format paper and is published once a month (however the periodicity of the newspaper is not stable: for example, between January and May 2004, only two issues were published). Its circulation is 500 copies (previously its circulation was 5,000) and its retail price is 30 tetri.

The newspaper does not have any technical equipment. The text is edited and designed at the computer centre in Marneuli and is printed in Tbilisi.

The newspaper has a staff of eight people: an editor, an executive secretary, two proof-readers, an accountant and three correspondents.

### **Newspaper *Heirati***

This newspaper is independent and has been published since 1990. It is the publishing arm of the *Heirati* public movement. It prints articles in the Georgian, Azeri and Russian languages.

The newspaper aims to provide the Azeri population in the district with information about what is taking place across Georgia. Particular interest is focused on issues that directly affect the Azeri population. This is reflected in the paper's various section headings: laws passed by the European Council on



ethnic minorities; Azeris and the Georgian Government; Azeris and the world. There is a section called 'Open Microphone' where anyone can express his views on current political issues. The paper also often reprints articles published in the foreign media about Azerbaijan and the Azeris. Much attention is paid to how the foreign media reports on the Karabakh conflict.

Like other printed publications in the region, *Heirati* has serious financial problems; the newspaper does not come out regularly or in a regular size. *Heirati* has no income at all. It has no advertisements and is not sold. The newspaper is distributed free of charge to the Azeri populations of Marneuli, Bolnisi, Dmanisi and Gardabani. It exists largely thanks to contributions made by private individuals.

The newspaper does not have an editorial staff. An editor supervises the editing of the paper, but there is no permanent editorial position. Articles published in the paper are provided by local enthusiasts who are not paid for their work. Depending on how busy the paper is, the number of the people working there ranges from five to 15.

The newspaper does not have any technical equipment other than the editor's own dictaphone.

The text of the newspaper is edited locally in Marneuli, but it is designed and printed in Tbilisi. The paper ranges from four to eight pages and it is published once a month (though often this periodicity cannot be maintained). It is printed in A3 format. The circulation of *Heirati* is not stable: from 500 to 1,000 copies. The newspaper is distributed to the regional population free of charge.

### **Magazine *Ehli-Beiti***

*Ehli-Beiti* magazine belongs to the Caucasian representation of the organisation *Ehli-Beiti*, which was established in 2001. The magazine itself has been published since 2003.

The magazine exists based on contributions made by the local Muslim community and Muslim business people living abroad.

*Ehli-Beiti* is a religious magazine; it is dedicated entirely to Islamic laws and theological issues. Attention is also paid to the ethnographic features of the Azeri population in Kvemo Kartli. Although *Ehli-Beiti* is of religious character and is dedicated to the problems of Islam, it is not distributed to other Muslim communities in Georgia (Pankisi Gorge and Ajara) since it is published in the Azeri language.

The newspaper's length ranges from 30 to 40 pages; it is printed on high-quality A4 format paper and is published once a month (sometimes once every two months). It has a circulation of 250 copies.

Its technical equipment includes a computer, a scanner and a printer. The magazine does not employ permanent editorial staff – the work is done by members of the *Ehli-Beiti* organisation.

### **Newspaper *Borchaloeli Mola* (A Mola from Borchalo)**

This newspaper has been published since October 2002, and 13 issues have been published so far. *Borchaloeli Mola* is a satirical, comical newspaper and is a private publication. It depends wholly on the efforts of one person, its founder and editor, Bahadin Orjoev.

*Borchaloeli Mola* is unique among the regional press. It is not published regularly and it does not reflect any individual, organisational or group interests. Rather it is a means of self-actualisation for one particular person. Bahadir Orjoev is founder, editor and journalist of the newspaper. Everything published in the newspaper is prepared by him. His satire is intended to focus the reader's attention on problematic regional and social issues. Though its satirical letters are not officially written to anyone in particular, people often still recognise themselves and either reproach (often through the local press) or threaten the author.

The newspaper does not recoup its expenses. The publisher finances it from his own small income. Only 13 issues have been published since it was founded. Its circulation is only 250. According to local people, the newspaper is very popular, and when it is published people borrow it off one another.

The newspaper is edited and designed at the local computer centre, and is printed in Tbilisi.

The newspaper has no technical equipment. The newspaper is not published regularly; it is printed on A4 format paper and consists of four pages. Its retail price is 50 tetri.

## **Dmanisi**

### **Newspaper *Dmanisi***

This newspaper is heir to a Soviet-era newspaper; it has been published as *Dmanisi* since 1991. Its founders are the district Gamgeoba and a private

individual who currently works as the paper's editor. After the editor upgraded the newspaper's technical capacities by purchasing two computers, editor was given a greater share of the ownership. The Gamgeoba now owns 45%, with the other 55% belonging to *Dmanisi's* editor.

The fact that the Gamgeoba acted as a co-founder was financially advantageous for the newspaper. This also gave it greater stability. Despite the hard socio-economic conditions in the district, the newspaper has been published on a stable basis throughout the years. As well as providing subsidies to the newspaper by being part of the organisation, the Gamgeoba also pays to promote its activities on a contractual basis. Money received from the Gamgeoba thus represents one of the paper's main sources of income. Another significant source of income is money received from subscribers. Of a circulation of 800, 750 copies are distributed to subscribers. The Gamgeoba helps the newspaper to get subscribers. Very little revenue is generated from announcements printed in the newspaper.

Despite all this, these revenues do not provide proper financial support to the newspaper. The Gamgeoba is often slow transferring money, meaning the the paper's publication is delayed. So far, there has not been a case when an edition has not been published at all, though there have been several cases when the delayed edition has been issued together with the next issue that was planned. In order to keep publishing, the paper is also financed from salary funds. As a result, the paper's employees often do not get their wages for three to four months.

The content of the newspaper does not differ from that of other district newspapers. Most pages are devoted to the activities of the local Gamgeoba. Some articles are dedicated to the history of the district and the region and famous people from the district. The paper's attitude towards the local government, according to representatives of the Gamgeoba, 'does not go beyond constructive limits'<sup>8</sup>. Indeed, the newspaper has never published any articles that could create conflict between the editors and the paper's founder. In this regard, there has been no change to the newspaper's relationship with the local government since the Revolution.

*Dmanisi* is published once a month with a circulation of 800 copies. It is edited and designed locally and is then sent to Tbilisi for printing. The newspaper is published in the Georgian language. The newspaper is printed in A3 format and contains four pages.

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Levan Lomiashvili, Acting Deputy Gamgebeli of Dmanisi. June 9, 2004.

*Dmanisi*'s technical equipment consists of two computers. The newspaper employs a staff of five people: an editor, a deputy editor, an accountant, a technician and a journalist.

## **Tsalka**

### **Newspaper *Tsalkis Utskebani***

This newspaper was founded in 1935 and belonged to the executive committee of the Communist Party in the district. It is still state-owned and is the local government's newspaper.

The paper was not published at all between 1993 and 1999. In 1999, the Gamgeoba of Tsalka district restored the newspaper and since then it has been published under the name *Tsalkis Utskebani*. The newspaper depends wholly on finances from the Gamgeoba; it has no other source of income. The printed copies are not even sold and are distributed to people free of charge. Nor does the paper publish commercial announcements. The district is very small and its citizens do not need to publish congratulations and obituaries in a newspaper which is not published regularly. The Gamgeoba's subsidy, which amounts to 300 laris, is the paper's only source of funding, but in a district that faces a hard socio-economic situation, as a rule this money is either delayed or not provided at all. The paper thus faces many problems: it is either not published for months, or an issue is delayed. It also has human resources problems, since it cannot attract young personnel, and employs only a few old Soviet journalists who work without salaries and remain on the editorial staff only because they have been working there for decades.

The newspaper does not adequately reflect society's interests, which helps to explain the lack of interest and indifference towards it from local citizens. Its pages are mostly devoted to the decrees and resolutions of the Gamgeoba, as well as articles about the history of the district and famous people who lived in it, and about what BP is doing with regard to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline.

The paper does not discuss the district's problems, such as tension between local Greeks, Armenians and Georgians, the environmental consequences of the pipeline construction, and poor electricity provision (which has led locals to organise protests). Accordingly, it pays no attention to violations of the law relating to these issues.

The text of the newspaper is edited, designed and printed in Tbilisi. The newspaper has no technical facilities.

*Tsalkis Utskebani* is printed in A3 format and contains four pages. The circulation is 500, and it comes out once a month. The newspaper is published in Georgian and Russian.

The newspaper employs four people: an editor, a deputy editor, a journalist and an accountant.

## **Tetritskaro**

### **Newspaper *Didgori***

This newspaper has been published since 1936. It was previously published as *Kolmeurnis Khma*, then *Leninuri Gza*, and became *Didgori* in 1991. The newspaper was not published at all between 1992-1994. After that, it was published irregularly due to financial difficulties. In 1999, the local Gamgeoba recreated the newspaper as a limited company and became its founder with 100% of its shares. Since then, the newspaper has been published once a month on a stable basis.

The newspaper depends completely on funding from the Gamgeoba and gets 400 laris a month to cover publishing expenses. Although *Didgori* operates as a limited company, it has no commercial functions. The newspaper is not sold; rather it is distributed to offices, village Sakrebulo and schools in the district free of charge.

*Didgori* is a government newspaper, and this defines what it publishes. The newspaper is wholly dedicated to highlighting the activities of the district government. It also contains articles about history and famous people. It refers to some of the district's daily problems, such as poor electricity or low pensions, but the issues are simply stated, rather than researched.

The newspaper contains four pages; it is printed in A3 format. It is published once a month with a circulation of 500 copies.

The newspaper does not have any technical equipment necessary for publishing. It is edited, designed and printed in Tbilisi.

The newspaper employs a staff of three people who represent the editorial board. These functions are not distributed separately amongst its employees.

## Gardabani

### Newspaper *Gardabani*

This newspaper was founded as *Brigadiri* in 1932 as a newspaper for a suburb of Tbilisi, since in this period of Soviet history Gardabani was not a separate administrative centre, but was considered a suburb of the capital, along with the settlements of Didi Lilo, Martkopi, Kojori, and Tabakhmela. Later, when a new administrative unit – Samgori – was formed on the basis of this suburban area of Tbilisi, the paper's title was changed to *Samgori*. In 1963, the Gardabani District was established as an administrative unit, independent from the capital, and the newspaper became the periodical of the executive committee of the Communist party of the new district.

In 1996, the newspaper became independent and was published as *Gardabani*. However, the newspaper managed to remain independent only for six months. Disagreements emerged between the paper's staff on the basis of their nationality. Part of the newspaper was staffed by ethnic Georgian journalists, another part by ethnic Azeris. Correspondingly, the newspaper was published in two languages: in Georgian and in Azeri. The newspaper was published on a weekly basis and it was edited either by Georgians or Azeris in turn. Conflicts arose between editors about the paper's news policies. As a result of these internal arguments, several experienced journalists started to leave the paper's editorial board; it was not managed effectively, went bankrupt and was almost closed. In 1997, the district Gamgeoba suggested to the remaining staff that they should let *Gardabani* become a government periodical.

The newspaper is bilingual and is published in Georgian and Azeri. It is financed by the Gamgeoba. Some 13,000 laris are allocated annually from the district budget to publish the newspaper. This money foresees only publishing expenses; the paper's employees get their wages and royalties based on money received from sales and from publishing commercial announcements.

The newspaper is published once a fortnight, so it finds it hard to be responsible for providing society with news. It lists events that have taken place since the last issue was published; highlights the activities of the Gamgeoba; always mentions crimes that have occurred in the district; publishes materials dedicated to famous people from the district; raises awareness of past or planned cultural events, and also publishes commercial announcements: congratulations and obituaries.

The newspaper does not have its own technical facilities; it is edited locally, but designed and printed in Tbilisi. *Gardabani* contains eight pages and is published twice a month in A3 format. It has a circulation of 1,000 copies and the retail price is 40 tetri.

The newspaper employs a staff of six people: an editor, a deputy editor, a journalist, an accountant and Georgian and Azeri language specialists.

## **Bolnisi**

### **Newspaper *Bolnisi***

This newspaper has been published since 1938 and it was called *Tsiteli Drosha* (*Red Flag*). It was re-named *Bolnisi* in 1990. Between 1993-1999, the newspaper was on the balance sheet of the regional Gamgeoba but it was not published. In 1999, the district court registered it as a limited company, whose founders are the district Gamgeoba and the district representation of the Department of Property Management.

The Gamgeoba part-funds publication of the newspaper. Money for printing and salaries are raised from subscriptions, commercial announcements and sales. Of course, this is not enough for the newspaper to operate normally, so when this money runs out, the Gamgeoba provides 1,000 lari to the newspaper. As well as direct subsidies, the local government also provides a whole range of indirect subsidies to the newspaper. For example, the newspaper does not pay anything for electricity and rent.

*Bolnisi's* contents are defined by its status as the Gamgeoba's newspaper. It is wholly dedicated to highlighting the activities of the Gamgeoba, and has so far not published any articles criticising it. The Revolution in November 2003 changed nothing in this respect: the newspaper continues to be an organ for the local government to state and broadcast its position. The newspaper also publishes complaints from the local population regarding their daily problems. As a rule, however, the newspaper does not go beyond stating the problem.

The only technical equipment the newspaper has is a dictaphone. The text is edited locally, but is designed and printed in Tbilisi. The newspaper is published once a fortnight, sometimes twice in three weeks. It was issued once a week during the elections. *Bolnisi* is printed in A3 format and contains eight pages. Its circulation is 300, of which 280 copies are distributed to subscribers. The retail price of the newspaper is 50 tetri.

*Bolnisi* employs seven people: an editor, a proof-reader, two correspondents, an accountant, a driver and a cleaner.

### **TV company *V Channel***

The TV company *V Channel* has been in existence since 1994. It is a limited company and was founded by private individuals. At first, it was in completely private hands and had two founders who possessed equal shares. The company is now 100% state owned.

In 1999, one of *V Channel*'s founders sold his 50% share to the local government, as a result of which state control over the company increased (it should be noted that the second founder of *V Channel* was a brother of the local Gamgebeli). After the revolution, when the Shevardnadze-era Gamgebeli resigned, his brother, who owned 50% of *V Channel*, gave his share to the Gamgeoba. The TV company *V Channel* is thus now completely state owned.

The TV company is totally financed by the Gamgeoba. Even when 50% of the company was still in private possession, *V Channel* operated thanks to the Gamgeoba. Consequently, the company's news programme mostly highlights the activities of the Gamgeoba, just as the government-owned newspaper does. The channel's news programme is broadcast twice a week: on Sundays (a summary of the whole week's events) and repeated on Mondays with extra news (Gamgeoba meetings are held on Mondays).

*V Channel*'s on-air network is very poor and only the news programme is broadcast regularly. It sometimes prepares entertainment and educational programmes. Despite having few programmes of its own, the company operates from 8 a.m. until 2 a.m. and mostly broadcasts music videos and films.

The TV company receives some – though very few – orders for commercial advertisements. It also has commercial announcements: congratulations and obituaries. The money raised from these is very little and is of course not enough for the company to operate.

In the not too distant past, the TV company received assistance from Internews for vocational human resources training and to upgrade their qualifications. They also received technical equipment from Internews in 1996. Thanks to the personnel trained and the technical equipment the company received from Internews, it was able to arrange debates on the elections in 1999 and carried out live broadcasts.



*V Channel* has the following technical equipment: a VHS on-air system, a SUPER VHS editing table, an editing computer, two Panasonic cameras, a JVS editing set and controller, a voice mixer, four video recorders, TV sets, and its own transmitter.

*V Channel* broadcasts over an area with a radius of 30 km, and besides Bolnisi it also covers part of the Marneuli and Tsalka districts.

The TV company employs 17 people: Director of Television, Head of the Technical Department, seven journalists, three camera operators, an anchor and technical staff.

### **TV Company *XII Channel***

This TV company was founded in 1996. It is a limited company and has one founder. *XII Channel's* history is tied up with the early years of the development of television in Kvemo Kartli and the first period of the Levan Mamaladze government. Between 1994 and 1996, the founder of *XII Channel* was one of the founders of the regional TV company *Kldekari*. When this company's broadcasting frequency was handed over to the TV company *Iberia* in order to establish a new regional television network, *XII Channel* was set up in Bolnisi. The founder assumed that this company would serve as the basis for a future regional broadcasting company, but this assumption has proved unjustified. To this day, *XII Channel* broadcasts only in Bolnisi and to parts of other districts in Kvemo Kartli.

The main problem the company faces is a lack of funding. Unlike *V Channel*, it has had no material support from the Gamgeoba for a long time. The organisation is affiliated to *Rustavi 2* and broadcasts this company's programmes. Before the revolution, the Gamgeoba's attitude towards it was very unfriendly. The company was taken to court by the local government several times about the legality of its broadcasting and about the ownership of the building it occupied. The situation changed after the revolution. The local government made an agreement to publicise its activities with *XII Channel*, which has generated some income for the organisation. Commercial announcements represent a small source of income for the company. Technical and financial assistance from Internews is very important to *XII Channel*. Internews helped the company to upgrade its journalists' qualifications; it also orders social advertisements. The company has not so far received grants from international organisations or foundations.

*XII Channel* has serious technical problems after its office was burgled twice. Almost all its technical equipment was stolen. Because of this, the company has been unable to prepare its own programmes and has switched to re-broadcasting programmes from *Rustavi 2*. Currently, *XII Channel* only broadcasts a 15-minute news programme once a week.

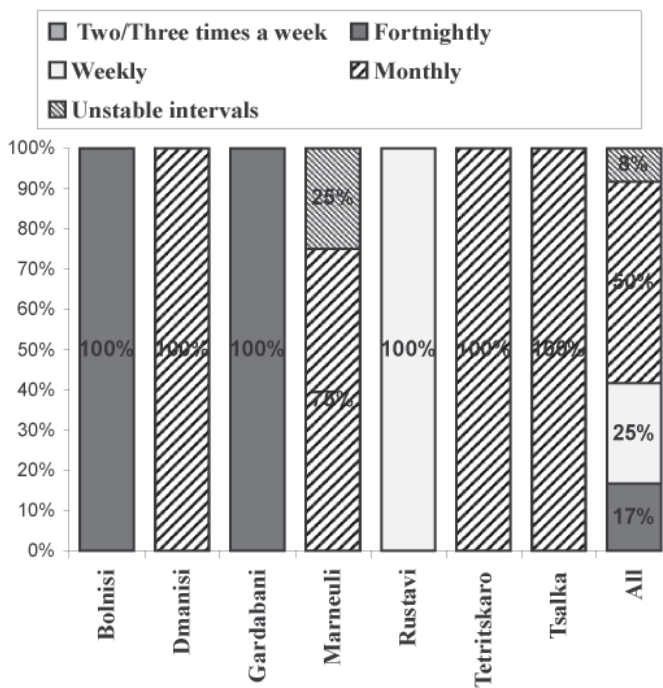
*XII Channel* is a member of a network of independent TV companies, but this provides no financial or technical assistance. Nonetheless, being in this network is advantageous because of the relationship it allows with *Rustavi 2*. By broadcasting its programmes, *XII Channel* can fill its on-air time with popular programmes and films, and can place commercial announcements and advertisements among these programmes. Moreover, before the Revolution, *Rustavi 2* was a good partner to *XII Channel* during its clash with the local *Gamgeoba*.

The company's technical equipment is very poor and comprises only a SUPER VHS video camera, a few outdated TV sets and a video recorder. Editing is performed using the video recorders.

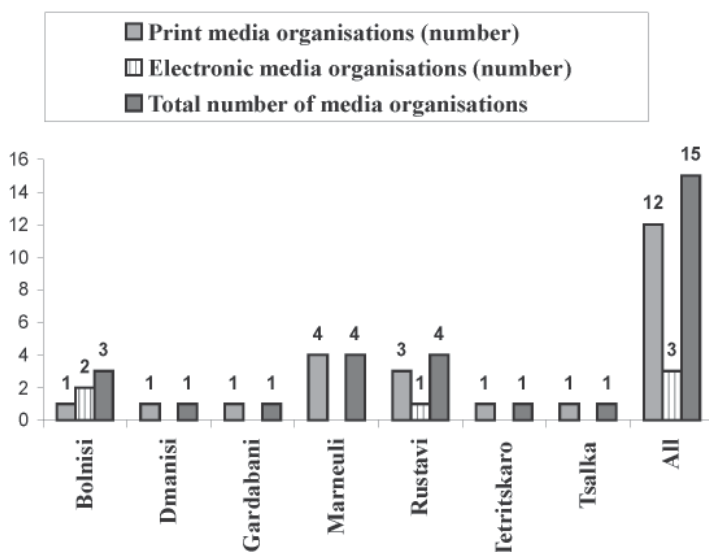
*XII Channel* has its own transmitter and a tower, which enables the TV company to broadcast its programs in Bolnisi and in part of the Marneuli, Tetritskaro and Dmanisi districts.

*XII Channel* has a staff of four people: a director (who is also the anchor on the news programme), a journalist, a camera operator and a technical assistant.

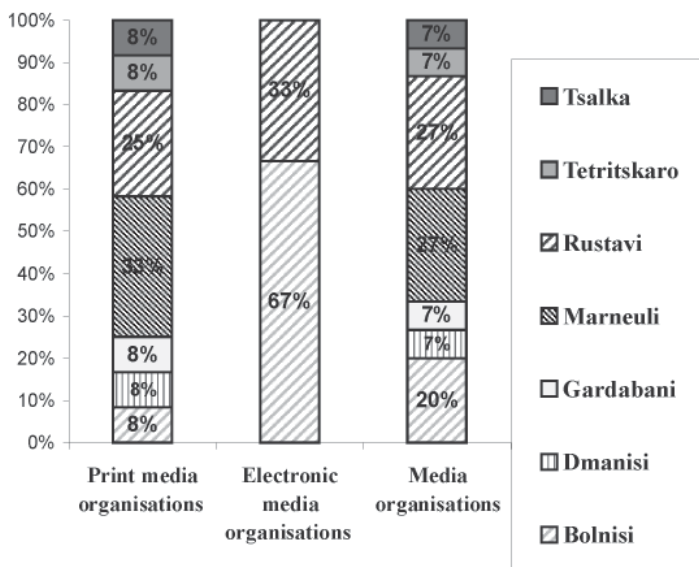
### Publication intervals of print media organisations in Kvemo Kartli by district



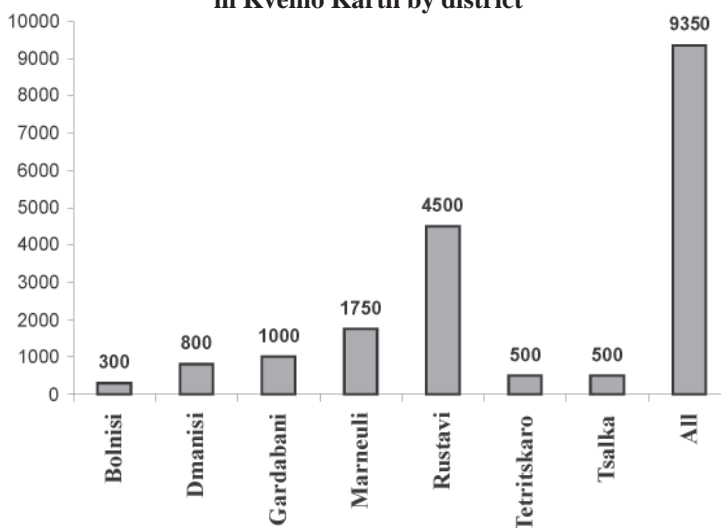
### Number of media organisations in Kvemo Kartli by district



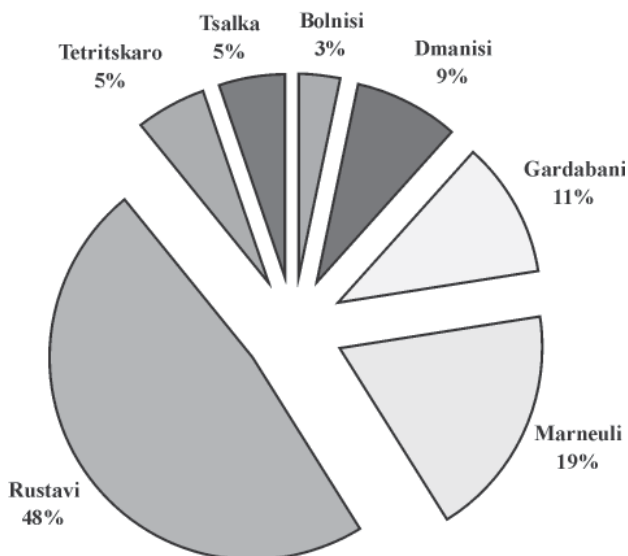
### Percentage distribution of media organisations in Kvemo Kartli by district



**Overall circulation of print media  
in Kvemo Kartli by district**



**Pie chart showing overall circulation of print media  
in Kvemo Kartli by district**



# KAKHETI<sup>1</sup>

Population <sup>3</sup>						
	Total	Georgian	Azeri	Kisti	Ossetian	Other
<b>Kakheti</b>	<b>407 182</b>	<b>341 503</b>	<b>40 036</b>	<b>6 997</b>	<b>6 109</b>	<b>12 537</b>
Telavi	70 589	60 370	8 373	58	412	1 376
Gurjaani	72 618	71 148	58	0	463	949
Sagarejo	59 212	39 409	18 907	4	125	767
Kvareli	37 658	34 296	17	1	762	2 582
Akhmeta	41 641	31 237	152	6 928	1 961	1 363
Dedoplistskaro	30 811	27 441	1 019	6	102	2 243
Sighnaghi	43 587	42 226	118	0	45	1 198
Lagodekhi	51 066	35 376	11 392	0	2 239	2 059

The Kakheti region represents 16.22% of Georgian territory and its population makes up 9.3%<sup>4</sup> of the total population of Georgia. Kakheti's macroeconomic indicators, with a GDP index of 0.49, rank it in fifth place among Georgia's eleven regions.

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<sup>1</sup> This study of the Kakheti region was held on 21-29 June 2004.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.parliament.ge/GENERAL/stat/gmain.htm> // Socio-economic situation of Georgia. 1997.

<sup>3</sup> The distribution of permanent residents according to specific nationalities in the scope of administrative-territorial units (regions), towns and districts. State Department of Statistics. Tbilisi, 2002

<sup>4</sup> Results of the 2002 census, State Department of Statistics. Tbilisi 2002

## **The Specific Features of the Region and their Influence on Media Development**

Like the Kvemo Kartli region, Kakheti was for years characterised by it clannish, authoritarian regime. Whilst the regime in Kvemo Kartli was based on controlling financial profit from local natural resources and heavy industry, for Mezvrishvili's clan in Kakheti the economy was based on agriculture and food industry in areas such as viticulture and wine-making. In both cases, strong authoritarian regimes were established in regions where the economic infrastructure still depends on and is firmly tied to foreign markets; this allows for the stable turnover of a significant amount of money.

The management of the region's resources according to private and clan interests led to the development of an administrative and economic system that avoids external interference and tries not to be transparent to civil society groups that may be interested in the clan's activities.

The development of the regional media has been influenced most strongly by the following factors:

- The regional government tried to control all profitable entities engaged in free economic activity, and to achieve this, various administrative tools and criminal methods were used, including kidnapping and hired assassinations.
- Citizens started to feel insecure in an environment where the abuse of power was common. As a result, society grew increasingly interested in the government's activities and current affairs in the region.
- This interest did not translate into the establishment of a wide-ranging, independent media, since the government monopolised all existing information sources and hindered the development of independent media as much as it could.
- The increasing demand for information and the government's failure to meet these needs indirectly facilitated the development of civil society and non-governmental organisations who aimed both to raise social awareness in the region about individual and civil rights and to defend these rights. This encouraged them to monitor the government's activities and demand greater transparency.
- Naturally, the corrupt government was not ready to have such a relationship with civil society groups. It avoided cooperating with them and

tried to strengthen its control over sources of information. This encouraged civil society organisations to take a more active, more aggressive stance.

- As civil society became more active, there was an emerging need to forge close ties with a wide cross-sector of the population, which served as a starting point for the development of free media. However, before the Revolution it was impossible to initiate such a process in the administrative centre of the region, so the free media found a home in Gurjaani, a more provincial town closer to the capital. Several independent publications were established; they kept in close contact with non-governmental organisations and were supported by financial and technical assistance provided by international organisations.

As far as media development is concerned, the situation in Kakheti is no different from what it was before the Revolution. Journalists are still subject to political influence and there is no free, competitive environment for media organisations since some of them are directly financed by the government. The assistance of international donor organisations remains the only factor supporting the development of free media. This support is not only financial; it also entails the provision of legal assistance and help from international and local organisations in cases where government representatives attempt to influence them.

Unlike Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, the Kakheti region is not that different to other regions of Georgia. Most of the population are Georgian speakers. There are a small number of Azeris living compactly in the Sagarejo, Lagodekhi, Telavi and Dedoplistskaro districts; Kists (Chechens) in Akhmeta district; Ossetians in the Akhmeta and Lagodekhi districts; and Armenians in Dedoplistskaro district.

More problematic, in terms of socio-cultural diversification in the region, are distinctions between groups based on religious considerations. The majority of the population in the Kakheti region are orthodox Christians, followed by Muslims and Gregorian Armenians, who represent only a small percentage of the population. There is no confrontation between these groups; traditionally, there has been confrontation only within the Orthodox Georgian community. The antagonism between Orthodox Christians stems from the growth of the Protestant movement within the Orthodox population. There have been cases of attacks on the Baptist community, where Baptist churches were burnt down. Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecost followers have also been attacked. In the last decade, the religious



factor has become more important among the Muslim community of the Kist population, where Wahhabists have taken significant positions. This change has been the basis of a generational clash (the elder generation of Kists observe traditional Islam). Muslim Azeris and Armenian Christians seem to be less prone to social confrontations and changes on religious grounds.

As a rule, the local media does not cover these issues. This is because government officials and representatives of entities that depend on the government (most of whom are Orthodox Christians) are guided by their own or the authorities' attitudes, which are based on their private religious affiliations. The independent media is very cautious about discussing such issues; it explains its position with the argument that representatives of local Protestant confessions do not address these issues themselves, and besides, there are more important issues in the region to be highlighted. Another reason that religious problems are avoided is that the majority of projects run or supported by international organisations to address such issues do not involve local media participation.

## **Differences within the Region by Town**

In terms of quantity, Gurjaani, Telavi and Sagarejo stand out with five media organisations in each town. Next come Lagodekhi and Signagi, each represented by three media organisations. They are followed by Kvareli and Akhmeta, with two organisations each, and lastly Dedoplistskaro, where only one newspaper is published.

There are a total of 26 media organisations in Kakheti, 20 of which are independent. The other six were founded by the local government and are registered as limited companies. Full or part ownership of media organisations by private entities or the local government, which is quite common in Kvemo Kartli, does not exist in Kakheti.

Of 26 media organisations, 18 are print and the other eight are electronic media. These print and electronic media are distributed by district as follows:

- Four print and one electronic media organisations in Telavi
- Four print and one electronic media organisations in Gurjaani
- Three print and two electronic media organisations in Sagarejo
- Two print but no electronic media organisations in Kvareli

- One print and one electronic media organisation in Akhmeta
- One print and two electronic media organisations in Lagodekhi
- Two print and one electronic media organisations in Sighnaghi
- One print but no electronic media organisation in Dedoplistskaro.

As far as the development of independent media is concerned, the leader is Gurjaani, where independent newspapers started to be published under the aegis of various non-governmental organisations in 2000-2001. A basis was created to facilitate close cooperation between the media and various local or Tbilisi-based civil society organisations. This attracted international donor organisation interest towards the media in Gurjaani. The independence of the town's media is now strengthened by the implementation of joint projects. Unfortunately, this refers only to the print media, since although the TV-company *Gurjaani* was founded in 1993 and is considered an independent structure, it has never received any grants from international organisations because of its close collaboration with and regular financing from the local government.

The situation in Telavi is very different from that in Gurjaani. The independent media in Telavi has suffered more political influence, and has been financially dependent on the government since the beginning. Media publications established since the Revolution have problems trying to stay in business. These problems are caused either by financial difficulties or by having a difficult relationship with the government. For example, of the five media organisations in Telavi, two were established after the Revolution. One of them nearly got into a major confrontation with the local governor and was forced to re-consider its position. The situation of the second one is no better: it is not always published regularly due to financial problems; it finds it hard to retain personnel and it cannot attract the attention of international donor organisations. This is due partly to the fact that for years these organisations mostly collaborated with organisations in Gurjaani. *The Mtavari Gazeti Kakhetshi* (The Main Newspaper in Kakheti), which was part of Badri Patarkatsishvili's media holding, used to be considered in Telavi as a stable periodical, but after the *Network of The Main Newspaper* (Tbilisi, Telavi, Kutaisi, Poti) was shut down, this newspaper also ceased to exist.

There are five media organisations in Sagarejo, of which only one belongs to the state. One of the two TV companies has no social or political inclinations; it belongs to a local businessman and broadcasts Russian entertainment channels. The other one has been actively involved in civil

life since the 2003 pre-election period, and thanks to the assistance of international organisations, it is a mainstay of the free media in the Sagarejo district. Only one local newspaper actively implements an editorial and news policy that is independent of the state. Despite serious confrontations with government, this newspaper has managed to survive without the assistance of international donors.

In Akhmeta and Kvareli, the media is owned by the local government, except for a newspaper published by the political party 'Industry Will Save Georgia' with money provided by the local wine factory. There is an analogous situation in Dedoplistskaro, where one of the local newspapers is a state publishing body and exists only with state financing.

The situation is different in Signagi and Lagodekhi. Media organisations in Signagi cannot solve their problems without the Gamgeoba getting involved. And in Lagodekhi, the media exists to a greater or lesser extent only thanks to the efforts of the local non-governmental sector.

In Signagi, only one media organisation is legally and financially dependent on the local government, though the other two would also find it impossible to survive without government assistance. The local radio is in a very interesting situation in this regard: it receives grants from international foundations, but at the same time, it also has a financial relationship with the Gamgeoba.

In Lagodekhi, meanwhile, it can be stated that the media was established without the involvement of local government, and is entirely the result of civil society activities. The electronic media here is more developed. Radio *Hereti* is undoubtedly the most successful example in the region of collaboration between the non-governmental sector and international donors.

## **Print Media**

As has already been noted, 18 of the 26 media organisations in Kakheti are print media. At first glance, the print media seems quite developed in Kakheti, but in reality the media situation in Kakheti is very difficult and many things hinder its development.

First of all, there are financial problems:

- The region is mostly agricultural; private business and the service sector – which require advertising services – are weakly developed.
- The population is greatly interested in the independent press, but its purchasing power is very low.

- For most newspapers, the main source of income is commercial announcements (congratulations and obituaries), but since most newspapers are published once a fortnight and very often fail even to do that, they lose out on this source of income.
- In most cases editorial boards possess only the minimum material and technical resources to be able to function; often they are unable to maintain regular publication, circulation or number of pages. Newspapers that are in close contact with the Gamgeoba are more or less stably financed.

Independent newspapers that receive assistance from international donors do not face such problems as long as they have a financial relationship with the donor within the framework of a specific grant or project. After that, as a rule they turn to the local Gamgeoba or local business people for assistance.

Newspapers that were established under the efforts of an international organisation may thus appear in the hands of the local government, business people or groups with certain political interests. In Gurjaani, the newspaper *Kakhetis Khma* (The Voice of Kakheti) faced such a threat. In spring 2004, the newspaper conducted a special seminar on the allocation of finances for the media from the local budget and on the fair and equal financing of the regional media. It is therefore necessary for donors to be more careful in encouraging correct management practices in recipient organisations. It should be emphasised that the Institute for War and Peace Reporting's cooperation with *The Spectrum* newspaper in Gurjaani, includes giving management training to editorial staff (among other assistance), to enable the newspaper to find independent sources to maintain its existence after the project ends.

On average, newspapers in the region are published once a week, though this is often not maintained. Moreover, some newspapers are published without any regular periodicity. Newspapers in Gurjaani are notably more stable and regular; they face the same problems as newspapers in other regions, but have turned out to be more financially sustainable. For some newspapers in Telavi, the main problems hindering their publication relate to their relationship with local government, which did not change after the Revolution. In other regions, newspapers are mainly financed by Gamgeobas. The exceptions in this regard are the local paper in the Lagodekhi district and a newspaper in Sagarejo.

The majority of newspapers are in a very difficult situation from the point of view of material and technical resources. Some of them are unable

to edit the text *in situ*. Only newspapers that get repeated donor support do not face any difficulties. As a rule, all Kakheti newspapers are printed in Tbilisi, regardless of their material or technical situation.

## **Electronic Media**

Compared to print media (with low periodicity and circulation), electronic media is intended for a larger audience and is more effective. For this reason, the local government most of all fears losing control over the electronic media. Of the seven independent electronic media in Kakheti, only two – the TV company *Tvali* (The Eye) in Sagarejo and Radio *Hereti* in Lagodekhi – can be considered to be truly independent organisations. On their way to independence, these two organisations managed to achieve success only with the assistance of international donor organisations.

From a financial point of view, the electronic media is in no way in a better condition than the print media. The underdeveloped local advertising market reduces revenue sources for the electronic media in Kakheti. However, if the local government is interested, it is possible to get funding from the local Gamgeoba. Apart from funding received from government, the local electronic media is also greatly supported by revenues generated from commercial announcements. Local TV companies are serious competitors to the newspapers; they broadcast information to a larger audience and do it more effectively.

Like the print media, the electronic media also faces serious technical problems. Scarce finances mean that TV and radio companies cannot upgrade and optimise their material and technical resources. Some electronic media organisations get help for this from international foundations and donors. Yet it seems that even after such assistance, further support is needed to prepare new programmes and to use the material resources received from foundations adequately. Programmes need to be introduced that are oriented towards upgrading the skills of journalists and editors, and this requires financial assistance from donors.

## **Media and Government**

It is very difficult to draw a general picture of relationships between the media and the Government. Of course, most of the media has been loyal to the Government because it is financially dependent on the Government,

and this remains the case. It is well known that even before the Rose Revolution, a quarter of the media in Kakheti openly declared their position, and experienced serious difficulties as a result.

Although it was possible to establish independent media in some parts of the region and many of the newspapers are considered to be independent publications, they are often observed to cooperate with or remain passive towards the government. According to local experts, some media organisations are used to make deals between their founders and the local government. Such organisations are considered the flagship of business people represented in government or of parties with seats in Sakrebulo. Despite this, there is a nucleus of established and independent media in Kakheti that managed to resist influence and oppression from government and from groups with particular business interests.

After the Rose Revolution, unfortunately, the Government's attitude towards the local media has not changed, except in very rare cases (for example, media organisations which clashed with Medea Mezvrishvili or representatives of her administration are no longer persecuted). There are some cases of journalists being beaten. In the case of one journalist, some local experts allege that the governor of Kakheti is to blame.

There have been cases when media representatives who were not welcome by a local official were not allowed to attend press conferences or other official or working activities. As already mentioned, this is often explained by the private sympathies and attitudes of officials towards representatives of the media. Sometimes the local government prefers current events to be highlighted by the central press, rather than locally. For example, there were famous events in 2004 regarding kidnappers and drug-dealers, which were always highlighted by correspondents of *Rustavi 2*, *Imedi* and other media from Tbilisi; special press-conferences were arranged for them, but no local press representatives were ever been invited to such meetings.

## **Media and Society**

For years, the local government and the Medea Mezvrishvili clan tried to make the local media passive and to control the flow of information. To some extent, they achieved this, but the public's interest in impartial information and activities in this direction by non-governmental organisations resulted in the establishment of a quite narrow, yet sustainable free media

circle. After the Revolution, several new media organisations were established in the region, evidently to respond to the local society's requirements.

There is public demand for local media. A wave of interest has been released in topics that have not been discussed for years, and both old and new media organisations have actively begun to undertake journalistic investigations. It is clear that they lack professionalism, and it would be desirable for international organisations and donors to pay attention to the development of journalistic investigation in the regional press. The public is interested in civilian control of local government. Media organisations often receive letters from readers. It is clear that they are very interested in articles and programmes on the activities of the local government and they are eager to learn about the outcome of one or another government initiative. There is, therefore, a demand from society: the media has to monitor the activities of the local government to some extent.

Of course, all this does not reflect the attitude of society towards the media in all districts. For instance, the Kist population of the Akhmeta district remains indifferent to the local media. Their problems are rarely discussed, except for cultural programmes about Pankisi that are sometimes broadcast on local television.

The same can be said of the media's attitude towards some groups in society. Rarely is anything published or broadcast on the rights and situation of religious minorities (rare exceptions being *The Spectrum* newspaper and Radio *Hereti*). There are quite large Azeri (in Lagodekhi, Sagarejo, Dedoplistskaro) and Armenian (in Dedoplistskaro) diasporas right across Kakheti who cannot understand news in Georgian. The local media does not consider this audience, and is missing a chance to expand its market. This passivity among the media could be improved by the work of non-governmental organisations and by developing civil structures within different social groups in the region.

## Telavi

### Newspaper *Telavis Moambe* (The Telavi Messenger)

This newspaper is the heir of a periodical founded by the Regional Executive Committee of the Communist Party in 1921, though the newspaper's staff tell their history as starting with a newspaper founded by

the Telavi Gymnasium in 1999. The newspaper became independent in 1998 and is registered as a limited company.

Despite independence, the newspaper is greatly dependent on the benevolence of the local government. After the military prosecutor's office entered the old newspaper's building, the Gamgeoba provided space for the editorial staff in the main government administrative building. In addition, an agreement was made that the paper would highlight the activities of the district Gamgeoba, in return for relevant financial support. Considering that the district newspaper's circulation is low and the amount of money received from sales is miserly, and also that the advertising market in the district is virtually completely undeveloped, the assistance provided by the Gamgeoba is the newspaper's only source of revenue. The Gamgeoba also assists the newspaper in attracting subscribers.

Other than the local budget, *Telavis Moambe* also gets some revenue from commercial announcements, but this revenue is so tiny that it fails even to meet salary requirements.

The contents of the newspaper similarly reflect this 'benevolent' attitude towards the local government. There have been almost no articles criticising the local government, either before the Revolution or afterwards. The newspaper's personnel explain this by saying that the newspaper is not aimed at stirring up conflict or taking private revenge on certain governmental officials. The newspaper has never published accusatory letters from the public. Because it does not come out very often, *Telavis Moambe* cannot provide timely information to society on current events; the newspaper is wholly dedicated to publishing the self-publicising articles, resolutions and decrees of the Gamgeoba.

Because *Telavis Moambe* was always loyal to the former government, it faced problems with new government after the Revolution. The newspaper was not published during the short rule of Tamaz Khidasheli, acting Governor of Kakheti (currently a majoritarian MP from Telavi district), because the Gamgeoba did not follow the agreement made with the newspaper in 1998. After Khidasheli became an MP, the newspaper started to function again, though it is probable that the local government may once again refuse to renew the agreement.

*Telavis Moambe* used to be a weekly periodical during the Soviet Union. Presently it does not come out regularly and is published once or twice a month.



The newspaper does not possess any necessary technical equipment. There is only an old printing machine that is useless in the contemporary printing cycle. Text is edited and designed in Telavi with technical equipment belonging to the Gamgeoba and is then published in Tbilisi. The newspaper is printed on A3 format and consists of four pages. Its circulation is 1,000 copies with a retail price of 25 tetri.

*Telavis Moambe* has a staff of only two people: an editor and an accountant.

### **Newspaper *Akhali Kakheti* (The New Kakheti)**

The newspaper was founded recently: its first copy was published on 1 January 2004. The newspaper is registered as a limited company and it was founded by a group of journalists.

The newspaper was set up in the aftermath of the Rose Revolution. Before the Revolution, the administration of Medea Mezvrishvili, the governor of Kakheti, greatly influenced and censored the independent press and it was thus impossible to found a newspaper at that time. Despite the change of the government, this new, independent newspaper is influenced by the current government. An article about irrigation pipes being sold as scrap metal was followed with threats and private insults from the Gamgebelis of several villages and also the Governor's administration. The newspaper's independent approach to such problems and to the new regional government's personnel and economic policies in general, particularly in the Telavi district, caused short-term confrontations with the majoritarian MP of the Telavi district.

The newspaper focuses mainly on journalistic investigations, on highlighting interesting events happening throughout the country, and on analysing arguments and deals taking places in the 'lobby' of the local government. According to the staff of the newspaper, they try to consider what their readers want the newspaper to report on, based on the letters they receive and the opinions, attitudes and reactions to published articles expressed in these letters. It may be said, therefore, that *Akhali Kakheti* does its best to make the newspaper interesting for the reader.

*Akhali Kakheti* cooperates intensively with non-governmental organisations functioning in Telavi – representatives of the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association and the Liberty Institute. This cooperation includes conducting joint research and getting information on human rights viola-

tions in the region; and also in the fact that these organisations to some extent defend *Akhali Kakheti* itself from government influence. The newspaper also collaborates with the *Association of Young Journalists*, whose headquarters are in London. With the support of this association, the editorial staff undergo training on issues relating to newspaper management.

The editors of the newspaper face serious financial problems. Despite this, it has not asked for any assistance from the local government. From time to time, local business people provide support to them; some issues of the newspaper were financed by the wine-making company GWS and by Telavi Autogas. The number of people wanting to place advertisements in the newspaper is very low, but this still constitutes a major part of their revenue.

The technical equipment of the newspaper consists of one dictaphone and a camera. It is edited and designed at the computer centre in Telavi University, but is printed in Tbilisi. The newspaper is printed on A3 format, consists of eight pages and is published once or twice a month<sup>5</sup>. The circulation is 500 copies with a retail price of 40 tetri<sup>6</sup>. The newspaper is spread via Sak-Press.

*Akhali Kakheti* has a staff of five people: an editor, a deputy editor (who also performs the functions of accountant and proof-reader), and three journalists.

### **Newspaper *Obiektivi* (The Object-Glass)**

The newspaper was founded after the Revolution in 2003, when Tamaz Khidasheli was the acting governor of Kakheti. The founder of the newspaper is the head of the press-service of the latter.

The newspaper started to write about matters that were secret or taboo. Articles published in the newspaper focused mainly on uncovering the criminal activities of Medea Mezvishvili (the former governor of Kakheti), her family, and officials and businessmen who were close to her. In the very first issue of the newspaper, information was published regarding an assassination that had not been investigated. This generated so much public interest that the whole print run sold out.

After Khidasheli left his position and Petre Tsiskarishvili was appointed Governor of Kakheti, the relationship between the newspaper and the government became more strained. Only two issues of the newspaper were

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<sup>5</sup> Initially, the newspaper was published once a week and consisted of four pages.

<sup>6</sup> Initially, the circulation was 1,000 copies, but then it was reduced to 500.

published in this time. On the one hand, the worsening situation can be explained by the presence of the old guard in the regional administration who did not like old stories being brought up; on the other hand, there was a conflict of interest between the old and new governors, since *Obiektivi* was considered to be Khidasheli's newspaper. This confrontation led the editor of the newspaper being beaten by unidentified people. Representatives of local non-governmental organisations accuse the Government of this, but the editor says he does not link the incident to the strained relationship with the Governor, and also excludes Tamaz Khidasheli from being connected to the incident in any way. Nonetheless, it should be taken into consideration that the founder of *Obiektivi* is the head of the press-service of Tamaz Khidasheli, a majoritarian MP from Telavi.

After the incident, the newspaper was not published for months due to – so the editor says – technical problems.

As mentioned above, the first two issues of the newspaper were mainly dedicated to revealing scandals. As well as journalistic investigations, the newspaper also has political, economic, foreign affairs and entertainment columns (Kaleidoscope of Events, Popular Kakhetians, Sports, Tests, and Crosswords). The founder tries to make the newspaper resemble the format of newspapers from the capital, e.g. Kviris Palitra (Palette of the Week).

The newspaper is edited and designed in Telavi, but is printed in Tbilisi on A3 format. It consists of eight pages and is published twice a month. Its circulation ranges from 800 to 1,500 copies. According to the editor of the newspaper, they are planning to increase circulation to 2,000 copies and to distribute it throughout the region. Currently the newspaper is distributed in Telavi thanks to the efforts of the editorial staff. The retail price of the newspaper is 50 tetri.

The newspaper has a staff of nine people: an editor, a deputy editor, a person in charge of editing the text, a proof-reader/designer, correspondents in Lagodekhi, Akhmeta and Gurjaani, an advertisement agent, and a manager.

### **Newspaper *Tsinandali***

The newspaper was first published in 1996 by the Tsinandali Wine Factory. In 1997-1998 the newspaper faced problems caused by reduced funding. It did not come out regularly and often was not published for months.

The local population in the village of Tsinandali welcomed the publication of the newspaper, since due to electricity problems the newspaper was the only source of information in the area. However, because of the local population's low purchasing power there were problems with sales; the paper's editorial board therefore decided to distribute the newspaper to the population free of charge. Congratulations, obituaries and other announcements are also free.

*Tsinandali* mainly publishes articles on historical and cultural themes. Particular attention is paid to the history of the village, famous people from the village who live abroad, and to the history of the Chavchavadzes and their role in Georgia's political and cultural life.

The newspaper does not have any technical equipment; the entire printing procedure takes place in Tbilisi. *Tsinandali* consists of four pages; it is printed on A3 format and is published once a month with a circulation of 500.

The staff of the newspaper consists of just one person – its editor. Articles and letters are provided by the local intelligentsia, mostly academics working at the Alexander Chavchavadze Museum.

### **TV company *Tanamgzavri* (The Satellite)**

This TV company was founded in 1989 by three private individuals. Two of them possess 40% of the shares each, with the third one owning the other 20%. The organisation is registered as a limited company. For years, the TV company accumulated debts to the state, leading in Summer 2004 to a restructuring process. According to the manager of the TV company, restructuring is also underway regarding disputed financial issues. However, he did not go into details about how shares are allocated between the founders of the organisation.

From a financial point of view, the TV company cannot provide for itself, since its only source of income is generated from advertisements and commercial announcements, yet there is virtually no demand for commercial advertisements and the revenue received from commercial announcements is not even enough to meet salary requirements.

The company's on-air-network is weakly developed, so it broadcasts programmes from *Rustavi 2*, its partner organisation in Tbilisi. Programmes belonging to the TV company itself take up very little airtime, approximately two to five hours a day. There is a news programme called *Matsne* (The Messenger) that is on air at 6pm and 10pm every day and lasts for five

to 15 minutes. They also prepare a few programmes: *Religious Belief*, *Shvideuli (Team of the Seven)*, and *Dialogue*.

‘Religious Belief’ is a religious programme and is dedicated to discussions surrounding Orthodox Christian religion. ‘Shvideuli’ is a music entertainment programme and is intended for young people. ‘Dialogue’ is a talk show where the audience can call and ask questions to invited guests. This programme is broadcast live and therefore is not edited.

The news programmes only state facts and are not engaged in journalistic investigation. Nor have they ever highlighted violations of human rights. Consequently, the TV company has had no disagreements with the local government either before or after the Revolution.

The technical equipment of the TV company has not been upgraded since 1996, i.e. since it received a grant from the Eurasia Foundation. The manager of the TV company refrained from talking about what equipment is on the organisation’s balance sheet. The TV company has its own tower and covers the districts of Telavi, Akhmeta and Kvareli, and part of the Gurjaani district as well. The TV company has a broadcasting license.

The TV-company has a staff of 18 people, only three of which are journalists.

### ***Bulletin of the Information Centre of the Telavi Local Government – Telavis Sarke (The Mirror of Telavi)***

The Telavi Information Centre was established in 2003 with finances provided by the Swiss Agency for Development and the Eurasia Foundation. It was founded in various towns as a part of a network of analogous centres (Telavi, Signaghi, Lagodekhi, Rustavi, Gori, Kutaisi, Zestaponi, Lanchkhuti, and Ambrolauri). The Centre’s activities are focused on making public information available to citizens.

The bulletin provides a wide range of information on issues such as activities and meetings held by the local government and utility tariffs.

The Information Centre’s bulletin studies the public’s interest in various problems through sociological surveys and, correspondingly, dedicates each subsequent edition of the bulletin to the most problematic issue as identified by the results of the survey. The most frequently identified problems are those related to drinking water, utility tariffs and electricity supply.

Other than the bulletin, the Information Centre arranges for government representatives to meet with the public, in order that the latter gets access

to information. These meetings are highlighted in the Information Centre's bulletin.

The readers of *Telavis Sarke* are not only ordinary citizens. The bulletin is distributed to non-governmental organisations and local government offices free of charge.

The Bulletin of the Information Centre is published once a fortnight. It consists of eight pages and is printed in A4 format. It is edited and designed locally and is then printed in Tbilisi. Some 1,000 copies of the bulletin are printed, 800 of which are distributed to the public free of charge. The other 200 are delivered to representatives of governmental offices and non-governmental organisations. A staff of four are in charge of publishing the bulletin: the director, two technical employees and an accountant.

## **Gurjaani**

### **Newspaper *The Spectrum***

This newspaper was founded in 2003 and its first issue was published on 26 May, Georgian Independence Day. The newspaper is registered as a limited company.

*The Spectrum* follows an independent editorial policy and has often faced problems not only with the government before the Revolution, but also after the Revolution, both with officials and business groups. From the very beginning, the newspaper was oriented towards developing investigative journalism, and has helped to generate public interest in this. In particular, *The Spectrum* is regarded as an innovator in journalistic investigation in the Georgian regional press since it published investigative materials in the form of crime stories. This strategy suited its readers' tastes very well. Journalistic investigations deal not only with everyday criminal activities and the Criminal Code, but also with the criminal administrative and economic activities of local government representatives (at both the regional and district level). In this connection, and in order to demand more transparency from local government, the newspaper published a whole range of articles highlighting and criticising decisions made that violate the Administrative Code. It tries to analyse the effects of the local government's lack of care about the district's problems, and to identify ways in which the existing social situation may develop. The newspaper's pages raise aware-

ness of the activities of political parties in the district and analyse the private or business interests of representatives of these parties. It should be emphasised that the editors are not aiming to discredit or promote anybody in particular, and display an equally impartial attitude towards representatives of all political parties in the district that are more or less active. This attitude was clearly notable during the pre-election period in October 2003, when despite demands by the district administration that the paper should give the stage only to the government party, the paper allowed all political parties to publish their manifestos. Moreover, it provided a whole page to the majoritarian candidates in Gurjaani. Beyond ethical considerations, this step was justified from a pragmatic point of view, since revenues received during the elections allowed the newspaper to increase its circulation.

Another important topic for the newspaper is the dominant corruption in the district administration. In this regard, it publishes an anti-corruption appendix that is distributed together with *The Spectrum* with the support of *Maecenas*, the Association of Journalists (which was founded with the involvement and initiative of the editor), and the Open Society – Georgia Foundation.

*The Spectrum's* activities cause great dissatisfaction not only among government and business people close to the government, but also among representatives of various political parties. For example, by reporting on and conducting journalistic investigations into a murder that took place in the local wine factory before the elections in 2003 (the murder was linked to the fact that some weapons had been taken into the factory before the Revolution, and then removed afterwards), the paper provoked dissatisfaction and threats from local businessman who was the *Agordzineba (Revival)* party activist that time. The pre-Revolution government made frequent threats towards the newspaper. Representatives of the present administration also express their dissatisfaction by threatening the newspaper.

*The Spectrum* is engaged in very active and fruitful collaboration with non-governmental organisations both from the district and from Tbilisi, which help it to conduct and improve its independent editorial policy and to upgrade the professional level of the journalists. From its side, this collaboration helps the newspaper to build relationships with international foundations. *The Spectrum* received a small grant from IREX to purchase technical equipment. Through the Association *Maecenas* it took part in an *Open Society Georgia Foundation* programme to develop journalistic investigation, and since 2004 it has been taking part in a project on public

accountability and the development of the regional media implemented by the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR)*.

Participation in this three-year *IWPR* project will contribute greatly to the newspaper's development in terms of improving its management and material and technical basis and ensuring financial stability. The newspaper has already received two computers, a printer, a scanner, a digital camera and a diesel generator from the donor. The donor also provides communication appliances and a three-year salary fund to *the Spectrum*. Furthermore, the editorial staff of the newspaper will attend trainings with the purpose of upgrading their management, marketing and the professional level of their journalists.

Beyond the appliances received from *IWPR* listed above, *The Spectrum's* technical equipment consists of two computers, a printer and a camera.

The text of the newspaper is edited and designed locally but it is printed in Tbilisi. *The Spectrum* is printed in A3 format and consists of 12 pages. The paper's circulation is 1,000 copies, with a retail price of 40 tetri. The newspaper is distributed throughout the whole Kakheti Region.

The newspaper has a staff of 18 people: an editor, a proof-reader/designer, three technical staff, an accountant, and 12 journalists: two in Telavi, two in Dedoplistskaro, two in Lagodekhi, one in Kvareli, one in Akhmeta (providing reports from the Pankisi Gorge) and one in Signagi and Tsnori. The other three journalists work on the editorial board.

### **Newspaper *Imedi* (*The Hope*)**

This newspaper was initiated by *Imedi XXI*, a limited company, in August 2003. Initially, its name was *Imedi*, but in the beginning of 2004 it started publishing under the title *Imedi+*. In May 2004, the newspaper returned to its old name and is currently published as *Imedi*<sup>7</sup>.

The newspaper follows an independent editorial policy and is not associated with any political or business group. *Imedi's* main goal is to conduct journalistic investigations into crimes committed for everyday reasons, and into corruption in the district administration. The editorial staff have experienced some pressure because of articles published in the paper: verbal threats and physical violence against journalists. For example, because of an article entitled 'Who Is Going to Be the Next Victim of Personnel

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<sup>7</sup> In an interview with the editor of the newspaper, he refrained from talking about *Imedi XXI's* activities or the reasons why its name was changed.



Changes?’ the editor was beaten by a government representative. Clearly, however, not everybody responds to articles that create a scandal in that way. The ‘hero’ of one of the articles, an MP, sued the newspaper in court.

It should be noted that the local government sometimes responds to reports about crimes that have been uncovered. For example, a village Gamgebeli suspected of selling irrigation pipes as scrap metal was arrested, though he was soon released because they failed to prove him guilty<sup>8</sup>. According to local experts, this person was not guilty of stealing pipes and selling them as scrap metal, and his arrest was illegal. It seems that in this case, a particular representative of the local administration used the *Imedi* article to fire the Gamgebeli who had been arrested for stealing the pipes. The newspaper does its best to highlight violations of human rights both in the district and elsewhere. Readers can learn about cases of police officers breaking the law, including cases of torture in detention cells. The newspaper has never drawn its readers’ attention to violations of the rights of religious minorities, however.

Financially, the newspaper depends only on its own revenue, generated from sales and from publishing commercial announcements. This revenue is hardly enough to publish the newspaper; printing of the next issue is often delayed, or it is published at the expense of staff salaries. *Imedi* has not received grants from any donor organisations. Assistance from international organisations would be very helpful.

The newspaper does not possess any technical equipment. Its text is edited and designed in Gurjaani, but it is printed in Tbilisi on A3 format paper. The newspaper consists of 12 pages and its retail price is 50 tetri. *Imedi* is also distributed beyond the Gurjaani district.

The newspaper has a staff of 12 people, of which eight are journalists.

### **Newspaper *Kakhetis Khma* (*The Voice of Kakheti*)**

This newspaper was founded in 2002 by a private individual. Its first issue was published in April 2002 and it came out once a fortnight until 2003. In 2003, *Kakhetis Khma* received a grant from the *Open Society – Georgia Foundation* which enabled it to increase its periodicity.

The paper’s founder and editor and his staff had had some previous journalistic and publishing experience before founding *Kakhetis Khma*. Under

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<sup>8</sup> At the same time, accusatory articles against the same person were also published in *The Kakhetis Khma (The Voice of Kakheti)*.

the aegis of the non-governmental organisation, Georgian Foundation, he participated in the publication of *The Democratic Tribune* and *Khalkhis Khma* (The Voice of the People) in 2000-2001. However, when the grant finished these papers ceased to exist. The desire to continue publishing the newspaper led to the establishment of *Kakhetis Khma*.

The newspaper contributed to the foundation of a non-governmental organisation called *Media Centre – Kakheti*, which includes Radio *Hereti* in Lagodekhi and TV company *Tvali* (The Eye) from Sagarejo. The organisation aims to elaborate joint projects, find grants for these projects and establish a common advertising space where participating organisations share advertisement orders with each other.

Together with the *Guria News* newspaper from the Chokhatauri district, *Kakhetis Khma* is the founder of the *Regional Media Association*. The media organisations which make up the association's members collaborate closely to upgrade their journalists' professional qualification and share experiences, and also to search for grants.

The paper does not face severe financial problems, though external funding would undoubtedly be of great advantage, and would help both to consolidate its existing position and to progress further. With this purpose, the editorial board of the newspaper conducted a seminar in summer 2004 together with the local government Information Centre concerning how budgetary resources should be allocated to media organisations in the region<sup>9</sup>.

The newspaper aims to provide interesting articles to the reader. Together with the newspaper *Imedi*, *Kakhetis Khma* published reports about the selling of irrigation pipes as scrap metal. In addition, it also published articles on the regional Gamgeoba's personnel policy and on incompetent decisions made by government representatives. Before the Revolution, *Kakhetis Khma* had a very tense relationship with the Government, and private insults and threats were frequently made over the phone. The situation has changed since the Revolution, and the paper now has quite a normal relationship with the local government.

The newspaper has nine correspondents in four bureaus across Kakheti: Telavi-Akhmeta, Gurjaani-Sagarejo, Signagi-Dedoplistskaro, and Lagodekhi-Kvareli.

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<sup>9</sup> This initiative stemmed from the fact that an independent TV-company, *Gurjaani*, has been financed from the local budget for years. *Kakhetis Khma* asked the government to allocate budgetary resources to newspapers that were willing to accept.

*Kakhetis Khma*'s technical equipment consists of two computers, a printer, a scanner and a digital camera.

The newspaper is edited and designed locally, but is taken to Tbilisi to be printed. The newspaper is printed in A2 format, consists of eight pages (it was originally printed in A3 format and consisted of 12 pages), and the circulation is 1,000 copies, with a retail price of 50 tetri. It is distributed throughout the whole region.

*Kakhetis Khma* has a staff of 16 people: an editor, a deputy editor, two technical staff, a proof-reader, a designer, nine correspondents and an accountant.

### **Newspaper *Gurjaani***

This newspaper has been published since Soviet times. In 1995, it was registered as a limited company and has been considered to be an independent newspaper since then.

Despite its legal status, the paper is published with money provided by the Gamgeoba and in fact can be considered a local government newspaper. Other than funding, the Gamgeoba also helps the newspaper by providing office space free of charge in the administration building and by not asking for payment for electricity; it also helps to sell copies of the paper. The paper's entire circulation is intended for government employees, who are *Gurjaani*'s only subscribers.

The paper is not very diverse in content; in fact, no articles criticising the local government are ever published. The paper mostly publicises the activities of the local government, publishes decrees and resolutions from the Gamgeoba and information on working meetings.

Although *Gurjaani* depends entirely on money provided by the local government, the newspaper is not published regularly, and there have been cases when the newspaper was not published for several months.

The newspaper has no technical equipment. It uses the services of the local computer centre to edit and design the text. The newspaper is printed in Tbilisi in A3 format. It consists of four pages and is published once a week, with a circulation of 500 copies.

The newspaper has a staff of five: an editor, two deputy editors, a journalist and a technical assistant.

## **TV-company *Gurjaani***

This TV company was founded in 1993 by a private individual and is registered as a limited company. The company was founded on the basis of the Kakheti bureau of the *First Channel of the State Television of Georgia*, which employed local technical and human resources.

The company operates almost entirely from money provided from the local budget. The costs of its services are reported in a separate line in the district budget. Very little revenue is generated from broadcasting commercial announcements and cannot cover *Gurjaani*'s expenses. Some revenue is received from the Children's Studio: parents of children who take part in *Debut TV* finance the programme by paying a regular fee.

Despite its financial dependence on the local government, *Gurjaani* did not refuse to allow any political party or their representatives to take the air at election time (including during the October 2003 elections).

The company broadcasts from 8 a.m. till 2 a.m. Its air network fails to fill this volume, and for much of the time it broadcasts films and music videos. The following programmes are the company's own programmes: a publicistic programme 'Nothing Plus Everything'; 'Debut TV,' a children's programme; 'Eye of the Ancestor,' a religious programme; 'Actual Interview,' a live talk-show; 'Hip-Hop', a music programme; and 'Idea,' a youth education programme.

*Gurjaani*'s technical equipment consists of three video cameras, five VCRs and two computers. It also has its own transmitter and a tower, making it possible to cover the whole Gurjaani District.

The TV-company has a staff of 25 people, including six journalists.

## **Sagarejo**

### **Newspaper *Kakhetis Karibche* (The Gate of Kakheti)**

This newspaper was founded in 1995. It is a limited company and its founders are the local Gamgeoba and Sakrebulo.

Despite the fact that the Gamgeoba and Sakrebulo are the founders of the newspaper, they provide only partial financing to *Kakhetis Karibche*. The main source of income, which provides money for salaries, is generated from subscribers (the Gamgeoba provides subscribers for the newspaper) and from publishing commercial announcements.

Very little money is received from these sources, and it covers only fixed salaries, which on average are only 34 lari. No royalties are provided any more.

The newspaper mainly publishes articles on local problems. Apart from the activities of the Gamgeoba and Sakrebulo, the newspaper also reports social, cultural, sports and economic issues. Agricultural problems are given some attention, and relevant specialists publish articles about these issues. This refers mainly to the use of chemicals, with information provided to the public about which goods are fake.

The newspaper has had difficulties with certain political parties. For example, during the elections in October 2003, there was a harsh discussion between representatives of the Citizens' Union and Agordzineba (Revival), with both parties accusing the newspaper of being tendentious.

The newspaper's technical equipment amounts to one old printing machine. The text of *Kakhetis Karibche* is edited and designed in Sagarejo, but is printed in Tbilisi in A3 format. It consists of four pages and is published once a week with a circulation of 600 copies. 400 of them are distributed to subscribers. The retail price of the newspaper is 30 tetri.

The newspaper has a staff of eight people: an editor, a deputy editor, an accountant, a typist and four journalists.

### **Newspaper *Ivris Gantiadi* (The Dawn of Iveria)**

This newspaper has existed since 1946. It used to be the publishing body of the Regional Executive Committee of the Communist Party, and was published with the title *Stalinuri Sitkva* (The Word of Stalin). It was renamed *Ivris Gantiadi* in 1956. In 1991, the staff of the newspaper announced that *Ivris Gantiadi* was an independent newspaper, and since then it has belonged to the editorial staff. It has limited company status.

In the mid-1990s, when local government representatives needed the media that would express their positions, they began to put pressure on *Ivris Gantiadi*. This period did not last long, however, since the Gamgeoba soon founded its own newspaper, *Kakhetis Karibche*. However, the paper lost all the property it had inherited from Soviet times (the building, communication appliances, technical equipment and a publishing house).

With such a relationship with the local government, the paper obviously became a platform for expressing opposition ideas. Regional representatives of opposition parties actively collaborated with the paper, especially

during the pre-election period in 2003. This irritated the local government. Newspaper representatives were not invited to meetings of the Sakrebulo and Gamgeoba. The Gamgebeli did not give interviews to journalists from *Ivris Gantiadi*. Furthermore, government employees were forbidden to subscribe to the newspaper. The situation changed drastically after the Revolution, and the paper no longer faces such difficulties.

The newspaper depends on its own revenues, which are completely generated by subscription, sales and money received from publishing commercial announcements.

The newspaper has no technical equipment. There are only two printing machines and a dictaphone, purchased with the editor's private savings.

*Ivris Gantiadi* is edited and designed at the local computer centre and is sent to Tbilisi for printing on A3 format paper. It consists of four pages and is published once a week. It has a circulation of 600 copies, 500 of which are distributed to subscribers. The retail price of *Ivris Gantiadi* is 30 tetri.

### **Newspaper *Megzuri* (The Guide)**

This newspaper is published by the *Megzuri Association*, a non-governmental organisation operating in Sagarejo. The association's aim is to provide support to the development of local businesses in agriculture. The newspaper *Megzuri* is published to achieve these objectives, and the association provides advice to people starting a business on its pages. The paper has no civic or political orientation.

The first issue of the newspaper was published in April 2003, but due to the lack of finances, it has never been published regularly. Initially, the newspaper was published once a week, then once a fortnight, but after that it was not published at all for some time.

The paper has no technical equipment. It is wholly prepared for publishing in Tbilisi.

*Megzuri* is printed in A3 format, consists of eight pages and has a circulation of 500 copies (280 are delivered to subscribers). The newspaper is published once a fortnight and its retail price is 50 tetri.

Four representatives of the *Megzuri Association* are in charge of publishing the newspaper.

### **TV-company *Sameba* (Trinity)**

This TV company was founded in 1998 by a private individual and is a limited company.

The company does not have a broadcasting license and does not broadcast its own programmes. Until 2003, when the National Regulatory Commission deprived the company of its license, *Sameba* used to prepare several programmes, and news programmes that were on air once every ten days and lasted for a maximum of 30 minutes; it also prepared a cycle of children's programmes. The company mainly broadcast programmes from Russian channels NTV and TNT.

Currently, the company does not broadcast its own programmes and simply transmits the abovementioned Russian channels from its satellite. The company has the relevant equipment for this job. The company does not generate any revenue for its owner, and it is kept going only because the local population in the district is interested in watching Russian channels.

*Sameba*'s technical equipment consists of its own transmitter and mast, an appliance for receiving signals from the satellite, a computer, two camcorders and a mixing appliance.

Other than the director, two technicians are employed at the company.

### **TV company *Tvali* (The Eye)**

This company was founded by private individuals in 1996 as a limited company. In 2003 and 2004, it changed ownership several times. Currently, 51% belongs to one person and the other 49% is divided equally between two people. The company received an IREX grant in August 2003, which made it possible to upgrade its technical capacities and prepare new programmes. The main purpose of the grant was to ensure a fair and transparent pre-election process, and *Tvali* succeeded in doing so. Within the framework of this grant, live broadcasting equipment was purchased and a suitable studio was equipped. As a result, every party involved in the election process and its representatives had the chance to present their programmes to the electorate. The local government did not welcome the company's activities, however, and tried to hinder the installation of a line that was necessary for live broadcasting; often they cut the power while it was live on air.

The IREX grant ended in February 2004, but it has played an invaluable role in *Tvali*'s development. The company now broadcasts on a stable

basis and has the capability to prepare its own programmes. In this environment, it is not surprising that the company is well known to the public and there is thus a demand for advertisements and commercial advertisements, which is the company's only source of revenue.

Before the Revolution, the company had a very tense relationship with the local government. At the moment, its interaction with the local government could best be described as a business relationship. The company actively reports on the local government's activities and invites its representatives to participate in live programmes, where the audience can call and ask questions about the problems that interest them.

As well as local government representatives, they also invite guests to the district and famous people from the district to appear on live programmes.

As well as the talk show, *Tvali* prepares a programme called '*Chveneburebi*' (*Our Folks*), a news programme that goes out once or twice a week, and a cycle of analytical programmes looking at the following issues, which are vital to the district: environmental contamination, irrigation, mine clearing on land occupied by the former Russian bases, and epidemiology. Programmes made by *Tvali* occupy only two to three hours of airtime, with the rest used to broadcast programs made by Rustavi 2.

The company's technical equipment consists of two digital camcorders, five monitors, a computer, two tape-recorders, two audio-mixing appliances, four TV-sets and a relay link. The TV-company has a broadcasting license, and covers almost three quarters of Dedoplistskaro as well as Sagarejo.

The company has a staff of 14 people: an executive director, a producer, a technical engineer, a designer, six journalists and four cameramen.

## **Kvareli**

### **Newspaper *Ilias Gza* (The Way of Ilia)**

The first issue of this newspaper was published in April 2003 with financing from the joint stock company *Kindzmarauli*. The head of this business was also the speaker in the district Sakrebulo, from the party *Industry Will Save Georgia*, and this fact had a big impact on the paper's editorial policy and contents. However, though this paper is politically engaged, it manages to elaborate a balanced position to the spectrum of



parties in Kvareli and often asks representatives of various parties for information or comments. Furthermore, it does not irritate the local Gamgeoba.

Financially, the newspaper depends wholly on subsidies from *Kindzmarauli*, which is reflected in its periodicity. The company often does not transfer money on time, which can hinder the publishing of the newspaper for months.

The paper's technical equipment consists of a dictaphone and a camera. It is published in Tbilisi and consists of four to eight pages (depending on the number of articles). The newspaper is printed in A3 format and is not published on a stable basis. *Ilias Gza's* circulation is 1,000 copies, with a retail price of 20 tetri. However, the paper is rarely sold and is normally distributed free of charge.

The newspaper has a staff of three people: an editor and two journalists.

### **Newspaper *Kvareli***

This newspaper has been published under the title *Kvareli* since 1932. When the Soviet Union collapsed, the newspaper retained both its name and its staff.

*Kvareli* still belongs to the local government, though it does not get sufficient financing from it. The local Gamgeoba and Sakrebulo cover only 40% of its expenses, which has a negative impact on its financial stability, particularly with regard to paying wages. The paper has a stable circulation and is published regularly.

As well as reporting on the local government's activities, the paper pays a lot of attention to agricultural and particularly viticultural problems. It is also not indifferent to environmental problems relating to the gorge of the river Duruji, and it is also interested in the history of Kvareli. It also considers famous people from the district and reports on sports and cultural activities held locally.

The paper possesses no technical equipment. It is printed in Tbilisi on A3 format paper, contains four pages and is published twice a month with a circulation of 500 copies.

The newspaper has a staff of six: an editor, an accountant, a secretary/typist and three correspondents.

## Akhmeta

### **Newspaper *Akhmetis Matsne* (*The Messenger of Akhmeta*)**

*Akhmetis Matsne* has been published since 2002. It is a limited company and was founded by the Gamgeoba. Before the Revolution in November 2003, it was published on an irregular basis. After the Revolution, six trial issues were published in the first three months. Since then, the newspaper has been printed regularly.

Before *Akhmetis Matsne*, there was an independent newspaper called *Bakhtioni*, which was shut down because of financial problems in 1997. However, according to local experts, the real reason was the fact that the newspaper did not represent the interests of the Gamgeoba. *Akhmetis Matsne* currently employs people who were formerly on the editorial staff of *Bakhtioni*.

*Akhmetis Matsne* is the local Gamgeoba's newspaper and correspondingly, its main focus is to report on the work of the local government, though it also covers other issues such as: social problems faced by the public, the economic situation, illegal tree cutting and the environmental situation in the district.

The paper also has cultural and sports pages. Articles published in previous issues in which the public are still interested can be found in the newspaper's archives. To make the paper less monotonous and more entertaining, as the editor says, they have also included jokes and crosswords.

*Akhmetis Matsne* pays little attention to the social conditions of local Chechen refugees. The Pankisi issue is touched on only by publishing poems written by the Kist population living in Akhmeta district and by highlighting various religious or cultural activities taken place in the gorge.

The editor is very attentive to the opinion of his readers and publishes their letters too.

The newspaper exists only with money provided by the Gamgeoba, though it also generates a small amount of revenue from commercial announcements.

*Akhmetis Matsne* has no technical equipment. It is printed in Tbilisi in A4 format and contains eight pages. It has a circulation of 500 and the retail price is 30 tetri. *Akhmetis Matsne* is published once a fortnight.

The newspaper has a staff of four people: an editor, an accountant and two journalists.

## **TV company *Akhmeta***

The TV company *Akhmeta* was founded in 1991 by two private individuals with equal shares. Initially, the company appeared to be quite a profitable business, since its owners had a very interesting form of payment: the audience bought lottery tickets that were raffled on TV. However, the channel did not remain independent for very long, and soon the local Gamgeoba made the owners give it up. The founders took their technical equipment with them, and the Gamgeoba failed to operate the channel without it. For years, *Akhmeta* was forgotten and was left almost entirely unoperational.

At the moment, the company mainly broadcasts programmes made by *Rustavi 2*. It shows its own programmes for two hours a day (from 18:00 until 20:00). *Akhmeta* only has a 15-minute news programme (which is on air a few times a week, but not on a regular basis) and another 30-minute programme (which is not broadcast regularly either). The rest of the two hours is used for commercial announcements.

The company is funded by the Gamgeoba. *Akhmeta* also generates a small amount of revenue from commercial announcements.

The company's technical equipment consists of a TV set, two camcorders and a tape recorder. *Akhmeta* has a broadcasting license and also broadcasts in some parts of Telavi and Kvareli districts as well as Akhmeta district.

The company has a staff of five: a director, a journalist, two cameramen and an accountant.

## **Signaghi**

### **Newspaper *Paemani* (The Date)**

This newspaper has been published by the Signagi Centre for Georgian-French Cultural Relations since 25 June 2000. The Signaghi Centre for Georgian-French Cultural Relations tried to get funding from the Dumas Centre, which is based in Tbilisi, but was unsuccessful. Its only funding sources, therefore, are assistance provided by the Gamgeoba and revenue generated from the newspaper sales.

The paper aims to popularise France, and French culture, literature, and fine arts. It publishes biographies of famous French writers and extracts from their creative works. The paper also reports on activities organised by French teachers in the district.

*Paemani* has no technical equipment except an old typing machine. It is printed in Tbilisi in A3 format and consists of eight pages. It is published once a month, but this periodicity is not always maintained. Its circulation is 500 copies, with a retail price of 30 tetri. The paper is mostly bought by Gamgeoba employees and teachers.

*Paemani* has a staff of five people: an editor, a secretary/typist, two journalists and a 'printer' (who takes the prepared newspaper to Tbilisi for printing).

### **Newspaper *Kiziki***

*Kiziki*'s history started in 1912. It was initially called *Khma Kakhetisa* (The Voice of Kakheti). During the Communist period, its name was changed many times and it was published under the following titles: *Kolmeurne*, *Komunizmis Khma*, *Komunizmi*. In 1990, it was renamed *Kiziki*. It was an independent newspaper in 1991-1992, but it then became – and remains – the local government newspaper.

The paper depends wholly on finances provided by the Gamgeoba and its editorial policy is elaborated in accordance with the local government. Consequently, no articles are published without considering the Gamgeoba's position. The newspaper often writes about economic and social problems in the district, but as a rule it does not go into depth. The newspaper is entirely focused on the local government's activities and publishes the text of resolutions and decrees. *Kiziki* also pays a lot of attention to Signagi's past and to biographies of its famous people. The newspaper has a religious page '*Khma Deda Eklesiisa*' (The Voice of The Mother Church) which is run by the priest of the local church. Even the editor writes about religious issues and often writes against non-orthodox confessions. It is no wonder that he refused to report on the congress of Jehovah's Witnesses.

The newspaper does not possess any equipment necessary for publishing. The newspaper is printed on A3 format paper and the number of pages ranges from four to 12, according to the amount of articles. It has a circulation of 1,000 and is published once a fortnight. *Kiziki*'s retail price depends on the number of pages and ranges from 25 to 50 tetri. This is almost impossible to implement and in fact the newspaper is normally distributed free of charge.

The newspaper has a staff of seven: an editor, an executive secretary, four journalists and a photo-correspondent.

## ***Radio Sighnaghelebi (The Sighnaghians)***

This radio station belongs to a non-governmental organisation called *Sighnaghelebi*. It was founded on the basis of the old, Soviet, so-called cable-line radio. The incentive for setting up this station came when the Sighnaghians Society won a contest on Promotion of Culture run by the Horizonti Foundation in 2002. With the grant received from Horizonti, it became possible to upgrade outdated technical equipment, stretch new wires and prepare a series of cultural programmes.

Other than programmes prepared within the Horizonti project, the radio station managed to build cooperation with the local government by making an agreement to report the activities of the Gamgeoba and Sakrebulo. As a result of this cooperation, the radio station received 3,000 laris a year from the Gamgeoba. With this money, Radio *Sighnaghelebi* made a live broadcast studio where they invite local government representatives and members of the intelligentsia and arrange live talk shows. During these discussions, citizens can call the station and ask questions to the invited guests. Moreover, they prepare a news programme which provides the audience with recent information about ongoing events in the district.

The radio station generates revenue by collecting a subscription fee of 50 tetri a month per household. The problem is that the station's cable network does not cover the whole city and so it receives very little revenue. Other than the subscription fee, Radio *Sighnaghelebi* also gets some income from commercial announcements.

*The Sighnaghians* suffer from a limited electricity supply which makes it hard for the station to operate. This of course has an impact on the attitude of the potential audience. As subscribers cannot listen to the radio for weeks, they refuse to pay the fee, and those who do not have the station refuse to have the cable installed in their homes. All of this reduces *Sighnaghelebi's* revenues and limits the organisation financially.

Radio *Sighnaghelebi's* technical equipment consists of a range of Soviet-era appliances, new audio mixing equipment, a radio receiver and microphones.

## ***Bulletin of the Information Centre of the Sighnaghi Local Government***

The Sighnaghi Information Centre was founded in 2003 with money provided by the Swiss Agency for Development and the Eurasia Foundation and was established as part of a network in various cities (Telavi,

Sighnaghi, Lagodekhi, Rustavi, Gori, Kutaisi, Zestaponi, Lanchkhuti, Ambrolauri). The Centre's main focus is to make public information available to the population.

The bulletin publishes analysis of current events in the district, decrees and resolutions of the Gamgeoba and Sakrebulo, and laws passed by the Parliament of Georgia, to which a lawyer attaches explanations.

With the help of a sociology survey, *The Bulletin of the Information Centre* identifies the most important problem for the public and dedicates the next issue of the bulletin to it.

As well as providing information, the Sighnaghi Information Centre makes active efforts to defend citizens' rights. For example, it was revealed that a whole range of utility services providers took advantage of the fact that the public was not aware how much tariffs were. The Bulletin then issued a large publication with a price list of various utility services. The most important campaign implemented by the Information Centre uncovered extortionate details in an agreement made between Raigaz Ltd and consumers, which had paragraphs that violated consumers' rights.

It is not only ordinary citizens that read the *Bulletin of the Information Centre*; it is also distributed to non-governmental organisation and local government offices.

*The Bulletin of the Information Centre* is published once a month. It consists of 12 pages and is printed in A4 format. Its circulation is 1,500 and it is distributed to the population free of charge.

## **Dedoplistskaro**

### **Newspaper *Shiraki***

This newspaper has been published since 1937. It was independent between 1991 and 1997, but because of constant financial problems, the paper's editorial board asked the local government to take it into its patronage. *Shiraki* is currently a limited company and its sole owner is the Dedoplistskaro Gamgeoba.

Because it has little money, the newspaper faces many problems, including outdated technical equipment and a failure to maintain periodicity. For the same reason, it is impossible to attract young journalists. Neither the finances provided by the Gamgeoba nor the revenue generated from

commercial announcements is enough to solve this problem. The latter hardly covers 10% of the paper's expenses.

*Shiraki* mainly reports on the activities of the local Gamgeoba and publishes its resolutions and decrees. It pays a lot of attention to social problems in the district. There is a big problem related to drinking water in the district. Many articles have been published on the damaged water supply system. On *Shiraki*'s initiative, emphasis has been placed on the town's sanitary conditions. After several editions of this newspaper, the Gamgeoba solved the problem of landfills in the town.

In 2001, *Shiraki* started to report on serious problems that existed on the border with Azerbaijan. The government had not repaired the River Alazani's gabions for years, leading to the flooding of 178 hectares of the village of Jumaskuri. As the water level decreased, the territory became the subject of a dispute with Azerbaijan. In order to discuss this issue in full, the international programme implemented by Development Alternatives Initiative (DAI), which works on such problems, gave a grant of 1,000 dollars to *Shiraki*. Three issues of the newspaper were financed under this grant which were fully dedicated to this problem.

The paper's technical equipment consists of a typing machine and a digital camera.

*Shiraki* is printed in Tbilisi on A3 format paper and contains four pages (sometimes six). Its circulation is 700 and it is mainly distributed to subscribers provided by the Gamgeoba. The retail price of the newspaper is 30 tetri. *Shiraki* is a weekly newspaper and is distinguished for having more or less stable periodicity.

The newspaper has a staff of ten people: an editor, a deputy editor, an executive secretary, five correspondents, a cleaner and a driver (on a contractual basis).

## **Lagodekhi**

### **Newspaper *Lagodekhi*+**

This newspaper is published by the Association for Providing Youth with Information and Studying the Problems of Youth in the district. There is no separate project to publish it, and correspondingly no fixed finances are allocated to it. As a result, the newspaper is not published regularly and exists only due to the enthusiasm of and financial contri-

butions from association members. The first issue of the newspaper was published in 1999.

The newspaper's main focus is to report youth problems. These problems are the consequences of the hard social conditions in the district. Articles cover the problems of employment for local youths, drug-abuse and migration. A lot of attention is paid to the problems faced by the Lagodekhi nature reserve; cases of illegal tree cutting and poaching are reported. The Association for Providing Youth with Information and Studying the Problems of Youth is not satisfied just to write about the forest's problems, and often arranges youth days on Saturdays with the purpose of cleaning Lagodekhi's forest and park. The association also arranges some entertainment, sports and cultural events, which the newspaper reports on.

Apart from *Lagodekhi+*, the Association for Providing Youth with Information and Studying the Problems of Youth also published a children's newspaper, *Zanduki (The Old Box)*, but due to a lack of finances only a few issues were ever published and it was then shut down. The newspaper was published by schoolchildren from Lagodekhi secondary school and it dealt mainly with school problems and children's rights (one article was about the violation of a child's rights). *Zanduki's* circulation was 500. It was printed on A3 format paper and some issues consisted of four to eight pages. The newspaper was distributed free of charge and 11 children were involved in publishing it.

*Lagodekhi+* is printed in Tbilisi in A3 format. Its length ranges from four to 12 pages. Its circulation is 500-800 copies. Its periodicity and circulation depend on finances provided. The newspaper is distributed free of charge.

The newspaper has a staff of four: an editor, two journalists and a designer.

### **TV company *Lagodekhi***

This TV company was founded in 1997 by *Ekomi*, a limited company, and is owned by two private individuals who own 60% and 40% respectively. Apart from the TV company, *Ekomi Ltd* also owns a store and a electronics repair shop. The television company does not generate any revenue for the owners and cannot even provide for its own existence, but since this is not *Ekomi Ltd's* only commercial structure, its operation is not hindered by financial problems.

*Lagodekhi* is a partner of *Rustavi 2* in Tbilisi and most of its programmes are from *Rustavi 2*. The company shows its own programmes only once a



week occupying only two hours of airtime, during which it broadcasts its own news programme and a programme called 'Studio Dialogue'.

Studio Dialogue discusses problematic issues in the district. Experts in various fields are invited to the studio. The company has the technical capability to broadcast live, but very seldom uses it. Citizens can participate in the discussion by calling 'Studio Dialogue'.

After the Revolution, the company tried to introduce journalistic investigation. So far, they have prepared only two programmes: one about a case of wheat flour donated by a UN humanitarian programme being stolen, and one concerning 700,000 dollars that was forcibly collected in the district.

There is no demand for advertisements for *Lagodekhi*; the only exceptions are Internews and *The Spectrum* newspaper, which sometimes order social advertisements. A small amount of revenue is also generated from commercial announcements.

The television company's technical equipment consists of a transmitter, two VCRs, a TV-set, a receiver and two camcorders.

The company has a staff of nine people: a director, two journalists, three cameramen, an accountant and two technical staff. *Lagodekhi* has a broadcasting license and covers the Lagodekhi district.

## **Radio Hereti**

This radio station was founded in 1998 by four private individuals with equal shares and is a limited company.

Initially, the station broadcast only entertainment programmes, but the format was changed in 2000 and it also acquired news broadcasting functions. Initially, it only reported local events, but after it received a grant from the Eurasia Foundation, it got better technical equipment and could get information more quickly, making it possible to report on events taking place throughout Georgia and across the world.

*Hereti* is included in the the radio *Tavisupleba (Freedom)* network together with a number of other regional radio stations. The network consists of Radio *Hereti* (Lagodekhi); Radio *Dzveli Kalaki (Old City)* from Kutaisi), Radio *Atinati* (Zugdidi), Radio *Harmonia* (Poti) and Radio *Mtsvane Talga (Green Wave)* – Meskheta (Akhaltsikhe). Weekly radio bridges are arranged with these radio stations, which were very interesting during the elections.

The radio station has no difficulty acquiring information; it has correspondent offices in almost all districts of Kakheti. *Hereti* has correspon-

dents in Signaghi, Dedoplistskaro, Kvareli, Telavi, Akhmeta, and Gurjaani. Radio signals are not transmitted in Sagarejo, so it does not have a correspondent there, though if something interesting happens there they can organise a live broadcast.

In the 2003 pre-election period, *Hereti* received a joint grant from the Eurasia Foundation and Open Society – Georgia Foundation to organise pre-election debates. Within this grant a live broadcast studio was arranged, and citizens were able to call the guests in the studio and participate in discussions that were broadcasted live. As well as grants from these organisations, *Hereti* also received an IREX grant in 2003, which enabled it to upgrade its technical equipment.

Radio *Hereti* has a very busy and diverse range of broadcasts. News is broadcast every hour and lasts for 5-10 minutes. Programmes from Radio *Tavisupleba* are broadcasted from 9 to 10 in the morning and from 8 to 9 in the evening; every day, an educational entertainment programme, ‘Dilis Radio’ (Morning Radio) is on air from 10 to 12; on Mondays, there is a programme for ethnic minorities: ‘Your Right’; the analytical programme ‘Mтели Kvira’ (The Whole Week) is broadcast at the end of the week and summarises weekly events; programmes prepared by ‘The Association for Public Education’ are put on air once a week; the rest of the time is used to broadcast music.

The station had a very tense relationship with the local government under the previous government. The situation changed after the Revolution, though there was an unpleasant incident in 2004, when two processors were lost. Given the important information that was kept on these processors, there is some suspicion that this was some form of political revenge against the station.

*Hereti*’s technical equipment consists of three computers, voice control panel, transmitters and a generator. As well as the Lagodekhi district, its radio signals also cover parts of villages in the Dedoplistskaro, Telavi, Signagi, Akhmeta, Gurjaani and Kvareli districts. *Hereti* has a broadcasting license and gets services from the TV-Radio Centre of Georgia.

As well as a staff of nine people, the radio hires correspondents on a contractual basis. *Hereti* has 21 employees.

### ***Bulletin of the Information Centre of the Lagodekhi Local Government – Lagodekhis Kronika (The Chronicle of Lagodekhi)***

The Information Centre of Lagodekhi was founded in July 2004 with money provided by the Swiss Agency for Development and the Eurasia

Foundation, and was established in various towns as part of a network of analogous centres (Telavi, Sighnaghi, Lagodekhi, Rustavi, Gori, Kutaisi, Zestaponi, Lanchkhuti, Ambrolauri). Before joining the project, it used to be the information centre of the Lagodekhi district Gamgeoba and Sakrebulo. The centre was later established as a non-governmental organisation. At present, its main focus is to make public information available to citizens.

The bulletin provides a whole range of information on various issues, such as the activities and meetings of the local government and their decrees and resolutions, and the tariffs of utility services.

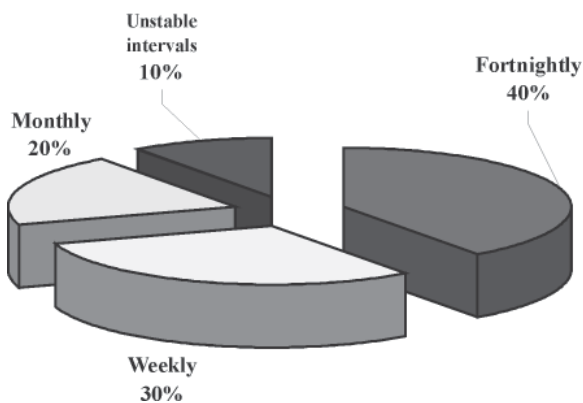
The *Bulletin of the Information Centre* studies people's interest in one or another issue and prepares the next issue of the bulletin according to issues identified as problematic and important to the public. Among these issues, problems associated with electricity supplies are the most common.

The Information Centre also arranges meetings between government representatives and the public in order to provide them with information. These meetings are reported in the Bulletin of the Information Centre.

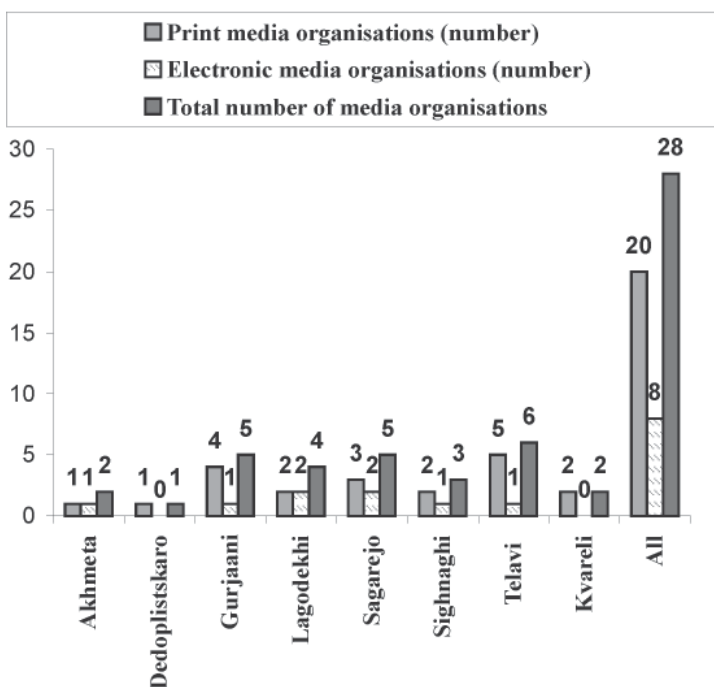
It is not only ordinary citizens that read *Lagodekhis Kronika*; the bulletin is also distributed to non-governmental organisations and local government offices.

The *Bulletin of the Lagodekhi Information Centre* is published once a fortnight. It consists of eight pages and is printed on A4 format paper. The Bulletin's circulation is 1,500. Four employees of the Information Centre prepare the bulletin: a director, two technical staff and an executive secretary.

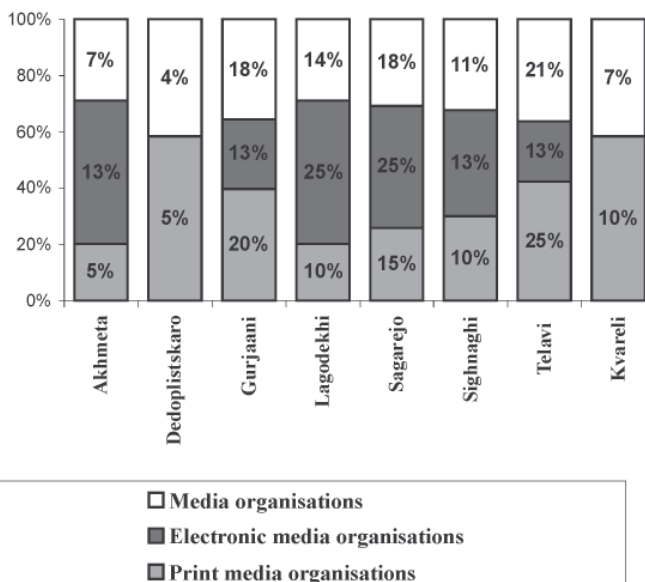
### Publication intervals of print media organisations in Kakheti by district



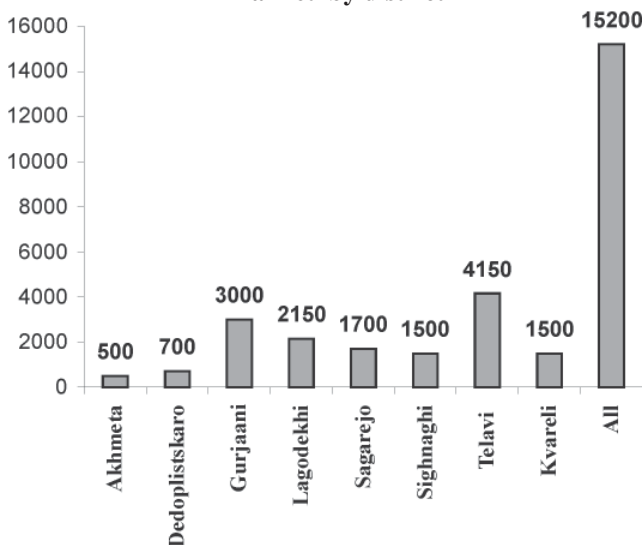
### Number of media organisations in Kakheti by district



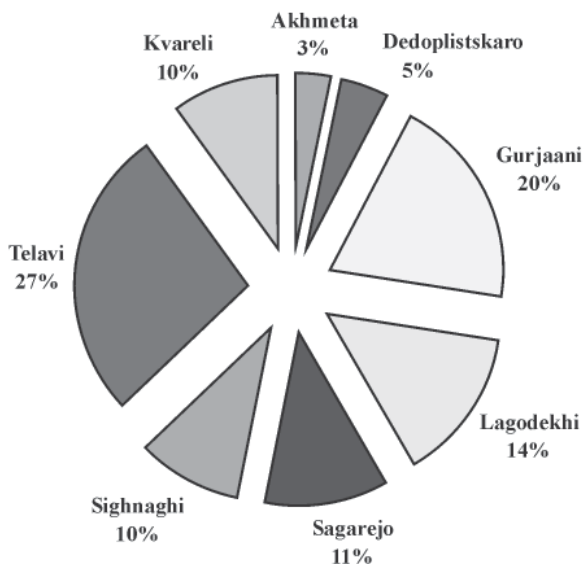
**Percentage distribution of media organisations  
in Kakheti by district**



**Overall circulation of print media  
in Kakheti by district**



**Pie chart showing overall circulation of print media  
in Kakheti by district**



## **SAMEGRELO- ZEMO SVANETI<sup>1</sup>**

Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti covers 10,7% of Georgian territory and makes up 10.6%<sup>2</sup> of the overall population of Georgia. Its macroeconomic indicators, with a GDP index of 0.52, rank it in third place among the eleven regions of Georgia.

### **Specific Features of the Region and their Influence on Media Development**

The Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region is one of Georgia's largest regions not only geographically and demographically, but in terms of its economic potential. In this respect, the Samegrelo region contains large contrasts: the densely populated and economically developed Kolkheti lowland on the one hand, and Zemo Svaneti, with its extremely difficult terrain on the southern slopes of the Caucasus mountain range and reduced demographic and economic potential on the other.

In the Soviet era, the towns and districts of the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region (as it is now) had developed agricultural, energy industry, transport and communications, and tourism infrastructures. It had economic centres which were important to the whole Soviet Union: Poti with its port, Zugdidi with its light industry such as paper, porcelain and carpet factories, Jvari with the Enguri Hydro Power Station, and Mestia with its tourist sites. Martvili, Abasha, Senaki, Chkhorotsku, Khobi, Tsaledjikha and Zugdidi districts were agricultural, growing and cultivating mostly tea and citrus plants. The able-bodied population in the region was almost completely engaged in this sphere.

After the collapse of the Soviet political and economic systems, the stable employment structure and usual pace of life were disrupted not only in the region but across the whole of Georgia. The situation in the region was exacerbated even further in the 1990s by the Civil War and the war in Abkhazia, turning the area into a testing ground for battle and sparking heated political debates. Because of this, the region's population has developed a marked sense of scepticism and distrust towards the State and political institutions or forces associated with it.

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<sup>1</sup> This study of the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region was held on 15-21 August 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Results of the 2002 census // State Department of Statistics. Tbilisi 2002.

Dispositions within a given society generally provide fertile soil for the creation of an informational space; however there is a whole range of factors hindering this process. Among the most important factors in this region are:

- The region's economic potential, i. e. existing transport and communications facilities of world importance (the Poti port); industrial infrastructure preserved from the Soviet era, which, if put into operation, could be quite a profitable business; increased demand for agricultural products from the region (nuts and citrus fruits) on the world (Russian and western) market; ample timber resources in the highlands of the region – encourages certain business groups to conduct business in a non-transparent, non-competitive environment based on criminal or semi-criminal deals made with representatives of the local or central governments;
- Intervention from state and political institutions in the aforementioned economic activities and their close ties to these economic interest groups give rise to demands for a monopoly of information and an absence of transparency;
- Another factor that encourages state intervention in public life in the region, particularly regarding open information and public exchanges of opinion is the fact that the region remains a conflict zone to this day; it borders the unrecognised republic of Abkhazia and is a zone where fighting has the potential to break out. Hence to some extent, the desire of state institutions to keep mass communications under their control is preconditioned by the unresolved territorial conflict.

Civil society in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti is particularly effective. Non-governmental organisations and public groups established either with the support of international organisations or on personal initiative cover a whole spectrum of social, political, economic and environmental problems, and provide a solid foundation for the creation of an independent informational space. However, it would be a slight exaggeration to claim that this is a valid prerequisite for the generation of an independent media. Actually, most independent media organisations actively cooperate with the authorities and with business groups, and are often perceived as the mouthpiece of these groups. It would be better to say that underlying civic or public factors stimulate the emergence of “islands” of independent media around which civil society unites, creating a certain space for public discussion.

The abovementioned relates more to one part of the region – Samegrelo. Svaneti lacks suitable conditions for the development, or even the very



existence, of an independent media. It has a difficult, mountainous terrain, which, given inadequate local communications and the tough economic conditions, hinders the growth of both print and electronic media. A more important factor in this respect, however, is low public demand for information, conditioned both by traditional localism and limitations and by its traditional business activities (self-sufficient farming businesses, due to geographic and climatic conditions). Therefore, the only paper in Mestia, *Lalkhori*,<sup>3</sup> is published by the local government.

## Differences within the Region by Town

There are nine towns and regional centres in the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region, with a total of 30 media organisations.

Poti has the most media organisations, with eleven print and electronic media organisations. Then comes Zugdidi with seven media organisations; Senaki has three; Tsalendjikha, Khobi and Chkhorotskhu have two each; Mestia, Abasha, and Martvili have one media organization each.

Thirteen of these organisations are in private ownership, nine are state owned, one is part-private, part-state owned, and seven were founded by nongovernmental organisations. Comparing distribution by town gives the following picture: Zugdidi – four private, one state, and two non-governmental organisations; Poti<sup>4</sup> – six private, two state, and three non-governmental organisations; Tsalendjikha – one state and one non-governmental organisation; Mestia – one state organisation; Chkhorotskhu – two private organisations; Khobi – two state organisations; Senaki – one private, one part-private/part-state, and one nongovernmental organisation; Abasha – one state organisation; and Martvili – one state organisation.

These figures for the number of these organisations and their proportional distribution show the situation in the region at the time of the survey. Taking into consideration the rate at which civil society in the region is developing, in the period since the survey was undertaken new organisations might have emerged and others might have ceased to function, This as-

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<sup>3</sup> *Lalkhori* is not reviewed in this chapter because it was impossible for the research group to travel to Mestia.

<sup>4</sup> The statistics include two Poti newspapers, *Eparchiis Matsne* (The Eparchy Messenger) of the local eparchy and *Eskulape* of the Women's Consultation Centre, however, due to specific lines of their work, we do not bring their descriptions in this chapter.

sumption is based on the frequently changing picture in previous years. For example, in the Martvili district alone, alongside the newspaper *Martvilis Moambe* (Martvili Messenger), which is still in print, a number of other newspapers were also published at different times during the 1990s, including: *Martvilis Spectri* (Martvili Spectrum), *Martvili*, *Chkondidis Zari* (Chkondidi Bell), and *Tsodna* (Knowledge). The same can be said about Zugdidi, which used to have a regional television company called *Samegrelo*, and a paper called *Akhali Zugdidi*.

In terms of the balance between print and electronic media organisations, 20 of the 30 media organisations in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti are print media and 10 are electronic. There is thus not a huge imbalance between these two forms of communication; the electronic media makes up one third of the total number of existing media organisations. On a town-to-town basis, the number of print and electronic media organisations is the following: Zugdidi – three print and four electronic media organisations; Poti – nine print and two electronic media organisations; Tsalenjikha – one print and one electronic media organisation; Mestia – one print media organisation; Chkhorotsku – two electronic media organisations, Khobi – two print media organisations; Senaki – two print and one electronic media organisation; Abasha – one print media organisation; and Martvili – one print media organisation.

The media has the highest degree of freedom in Poti, which is a large town, and in the administrative centre, Zugdidi. This is quite natural, since civil society in these places is better developed and there is high public demand for unbiased information.

## **Print Media**

Twenty of 30 media organisations in the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region are print media. Six of these papers are private, nine belong to the State, four are founded by non-governmental organisations, and one is part-state/part-private owned. As this data illustrates, state-owned newspapers prevail. At the same time, it should not be forgotten how difficult it is for a nominally independent and legally private publication to stand out as being actually independent. There are few such publications in the region, for numerous reasons, the most important of which are:

- The print media lacks the economic means to exist independently; the advertisement market in the region is feeble, and assistance from inter-

national donor organisations is the only way for a paper to maintain its independence; yet such assistance cannot solve the problem and bring financial stability to the organisation. In order to escape bankruptcy, newspapers are compelled to collaborate closely with local governments or business groups;

- Because there is low public interest in the media, it is hard for newspapers to increase their circulation, which means that they do not have the chance to subsist on sales revenues;
- Civil society representatives who are active in the region focus on the electronic media, which has a wider audience; they turn to television or radio companies to seek their involvement in coalition projects or to ensure coverage of their activities; often they have their own broadcasting facilities themselves;
- In five districts in the region, the state-owned print media (six papers), which makes up the largest share of the regional media, is the only means of mass communication. As a rule, these papers are the successors of Soviet-era editorial offices. As they themselves point out, it would have simply been impossible for these newspapers to even exist in these districts without local government support.

On average, the majority of regional papers are weekly publications, some are published every second week, and some come out monthly. Their circulations are also low, ranging from 500 to 1,000 on average. Circulation increases during elections. Income from sales at election time suggests that if these papers could sell a large enough amount, they could hope to exist independently. At present, private announcements (obituaries and congratulatory messages) are the print media's only source of revenue. Advertisements are seldom a serious source of income, even in big towns such as Poti and Zugdidi. For both of these sources of income, the print media has to compete against the electronic media, which is more efficient and covers a wider audience.

The print media faces serious problems in terms of material and technical capacity. The technical capacity of most regional newspapers is very restricted; it is only thanks to assistance from international organisations that some of them are in a relatively favourable situation. Some regional newspapers have no technical facilities whatsoever. Another big issue is the lack of a publishing house adequate for modern printing standards. There is a publishing house in Poti, but only one local newspaper uses its services. Newspapers in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti are normally printed in Tbilisi.

## **Electronic Media**

There are five television and five radio companies broadcasting in the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region. It is worth mentioning that two radio companies have been established in Poti and Zugdidi by the founders of the local television companies. Although both radio companies are individual legal entities, their names are usually associated with their respective television companies. Zugdidi has three radio companies. Two of these were established by non-governmental organisations and have the same agenda as their organisations.

The electronic media has more advantageous conditions for development than the print media. It has better resources to cover a greater audience, and it transmits many more commercials and private announcements. Consequently, it has stronger economic foundations on which to operate independently. It is a different question how much income is received this way and whether these revenues are sufficient to allow the electronic media to operate perfectly. Equally important is the fact that the electronic media receives greater attention from international and local non-governmental organisations, which see it as a mechanism to guarantee free speech and transparency. Thanks to this cooperation and assistance, the electronic media in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti can boast more liberal values and principles than the print media.

## **Media and Government**

Relations between the media and the authorities are generally constructive. Nevertheless, there have been instances when this balance has been shattered and the authorities have exerted pressure on the media. However, this scenario actually works in favour of the independent media. More often, though, media organisations readily agree to make deals with local authorities in order to attain economic stability. This type of relationship is possible in big towns such as Poti or Zugdidi; in other regional district centres the media is mostly controlled by the state, even if nominally it is independent. Most of the print media in the region is owned by the state, whereas the electronic media is either private or is established by non-governmental organisations; accordingly, it is the electronic media which comes under most pressure. Both the Government and individual political or business groups try to use television and radio companies as an efficient

tool to influence public opinion, either by putting pressure on them or by agreeing 'profitable' cooperation with them.

## **Media and Society**

The negative attitudes in society caused by the opaque and corrupt management style over the years of both the local and central governments have laid a solid foundation for the creation of an independent media space. The local population is highly politically active; its involvement and role in the Rose Revolution in November 2003 is an expression of this active stand. For the reasons discussed above, however, this political activity has not yet proved sufficient to establish a coherent independent media space. Rather, the public focuses its interest on particular media organisations.

The amount of attention the media pays to social problems varies based on the extent to which a given media organisation works to satisfy public demand. Media organisations that are owned by the local government generally stick to disseminating official information and reporting news in an essay-like fashion, and do not try to depict actual problems within society. The independent media tries to cover the whole spectrum of current regional problems. It focuses on political and economic issues and related to this, corruption and criminal business activities, social crimes, welfare and health care problems. It also discusses the reasons causing the existing situation, problems regarding the conflict resolution process in Abkhazia, and the condition of refugees. The independent media works in close cooperation with civil society. The independent media is in an advantageous position in terms of access to information and resistance to pressure.

## **Zugdidi**

### **Newspaper *Zugdidi***

This newspaper is the heir of the periodical founded in 1930 by the Zugdidi District Executive Committee of the Communist Party. Initially it was called *Kazakishi*, then later it was renamed *Komunari*, and subsequently *Mebrdzoli* (Fighter); in the early 1990s it was called *Odishi* and later *Zugdidi*. The paper is registered as a limited company and is an independent publication.

The newspaper temporarily suspended operations when state funding was no longer available. The paper has few advertisements or private announcements (the demand for commercials and announcements is small). The paper has serious rivals in the face of two television companies in Zugdidi<sup>5</sup>. The paper's editorial staff managed to build good relations with the administration and with non-governmental organisations, with whom it has signed agreements to cover their activities. As well as financial income, such cooperation also gives *Zugdidi* the opportunity to improve its contents. *Zugdidi* publishes official documents, decrees and bylaws adopted by the district administration and the city municipal council. The newspaper regularly publishes interviews with local government representatives focusing on critical problems. The editors place particular emphasis on the social situation in the district; the paper publishes pension and social welfare distribution charts and relevant official documents alongside articles describing steps the government has taken in this direction. Another issue of major concern for the paper is the situation of refugees from Abkhazia. The newspaper's principle is not merely to describe the refugees' conditions; it often organises information campaigns in cooperation with the local government and non-governmental organisations directed at assisting particular families. One such action aimed to provide lodging for an elderly couple living out in the open in one of the town's public squares. This action had its effect and the issue was positively resolved.

The paper reports continuously on crime, the most pressing problem in the Zugdidi district, especially on open smuggling and kidnappings from Abkhaz territory. However, it has never attempted to conduct independent inquiries, and restricts its reporting to official announcements from representatives of the district attorney's office and the police.

The paper often has articles on problems such as the power supply, drinking water, religion (Orthodox Christian), and environment. Its technical facilities consist of only one computer (which belongs to the employees) and four tape recorders. Typing and pagination take place locally. The paper is printed in Tbilisi. *Zugdidi* is published on A3 format paper; it has eight pages and is issued weekly with a circulation of 500 prints. Some 200 of these are distributed among subscribers, the rest is sold at retail; the price is 30 tetri per print.

The newspaper has eight employees: an editor, an assistant editor, an executive secretary, a proof-reader, an accountant and three journalists.

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<sup>5</sup> Today only one television company, *Odishi*, is active.

### **Newspaper *Saparveli* (The God's Covering)**

This newspaper was founded in 2000 by the pastor of the Zugdidi Matskhovris Kari (the Redeemer) Church with the blessing of the Patriarch of the Orthodox Christian Church of Georgia. The newspaper's purpose is to provide religious education for its flock and propagate church preaching.

As the founder of *Saparveli* asserts, the newspaper does not have a broad theological function and is more of an inter-eparchial news bulletin. Material for publication is selected according to the calendar; articles are about upcoming religious holidays, the lives of the Saints and significant events from the history of the Georgian Church. It also presents some literature, with both religious and secular stories and plays being published: religious pieces are framed, while non-religious articles are not. The paper also reports broadly on violence against followers of the Orthodox Christian faith in Soviet times; there are interviews with people, who were persecuted by the authorities for keeping their faith. The paper does not write about other Christian confessions.

The newspaper's funding is ensured by donations from the congregation and income from sales. The paper does not receive assistance from the Orthodox Christian Church of Georgia or the Episcopate (office of the Bishop) of the Eparchy.

*Saparveli's* technical capacity consists of three computers, a printer and a scanner. Typing and pagination take place locally; it is printed in Tbilisi on A3 format paper. Its volume ranges between 16 and 32 pages. It is issued monthly with a print run of 700 – 1,000 (due to financial problems, often it is not published on a regular basis). The retail price is 50 tetri a copy.

The newspaper is prepared by the pastor of the Zugdidi Matskhovris Kari Church, together with several representatives of his parish.

### **Newspaper *Kolkhetis Pari* (Kolkheti Shield)**

This newspaper was founded in 1999 as the publishing body of the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti Regional Police Department. It is not commercially oriented and is published by the Department press centre. The paper is not a separate legal entity.

*Kolkhetis Pari's* customers are policemen. Its contents are shaped to their interests accordingly. It features articles on reorganisation, structural and staffing adjustments, police administration meetings, official documents and regulations adopted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and documents about human rights and relevant laws adopted by the Georgian Parliament. Along-

side these official materials, *Kolkhetis Pari* writes about distinguished police workers, and publishes a chronicle of current crimes, files about criminals under search and materials of resolved cases. It also has entertainment pages such as crosswords, jokes, and unusual stories.

The paper has no technical equipment of its own and uses the technical facilities of the Police Department's press centre. Typing and pagination take place locally, but it is printed in Tbilisi. It is an A3 format, eight-page, monthly newspaper with a print run of 800. It is distributed to police employees free of charge.

Two press centre employees work on the preparation of *Kolkhetis Pari*.

### ***Odishi Television Company/Radio Odishi Plus***

*Odishi Television Company* was established by a private individual in 1994 and is registered as a limited company. Later, *Radio Odishi Plus* began operation within the framework of the television company. The radio station is not an individual legal entity, though it is organisationally separate from the television company.

Initially, the television company's existence was thanks to assistance received from international donors and its participation in projects run by them. In the beginning, the revenues it received itself from advertisements and private announcements were not even enough to cover technical expenses. *Odishi* has received grants from the Eurasia Foundation and the Embassy of the United States of America throughout its existence, thanks to which it has renovated its technical equipment and studios and purchased facilities for live reporting.

The company is a member of the *Georgian Independent TV and Radio Broadcasters' Association*, where different broadcasting companies exchange information and carry out joint projects. Within this association, *Odishi Television Company* cooperates with the Tbilisi-based broadcasting company *Rustavi 2*, with which it has an agreement to relay its programmes.

The company's programmes are not sufficient to completely fill its airtime; in total it has two or three hours of its own broadcasting during the day. *Odishi* has a news programme, which lasts 10 to 15 minutes, conducts live reporting with invited guests and prepares a weekly analytical programme 'The Theme of the Week'. Most of its airtime is taken up by commercial and social advertisements, and private announcements prepared by *Odishi* itself.



*Odishi*'s managers attach great importance to developing their social and political reporting. Currently, a lack of sufficient personnel with the right technical or journalistic experience means it is unable to undertake independent journalistic inquiry and analysis, which would allow it to cover the full range of problems in the region and meet its audience's current demand for information. In its current state, it can only just manage to report on events that are happening and provide minimal information on them. It is thus hard to judge whether the station displays any political bias or whether its attitude is more balanced: only during an election time might it become possible to tell. However, the very fact that *Odishi*'s founder and owner became an MP on the Joint National Movement list after the Rose Revolution may have an influence on the company's political leanings.

Radio *Odishi Plus* displays no active social or political interests, and does little more than relay programmes from the *Voice of America*. *Odishi Plus*'s own programmes are a daily twenty-five minute news programme, a musical hit parade and private announcements.

The company's technical facilities include three digital assembly desks, three computers, three digital cameras, a printer, five video recorders, a monitor, microphones and a prompter/announcer. The radio station has a mixer and a telephone switch. The television and radio company broadcasts across the Zugdidi district, parts of the Tsalendjikha district, and the Gali and Ochamchire districts in Abkhazia.

The company has 25 employees.

### **Radio *Atinati***

This radio station was founded by a non-governmental organisation, the Atinati Association, which was established in 1995. It works in three major directions: education, assistance to socially disadvantaged families, and promotion of non-governmental organisations. Radio *Atinati* was established in 1998 in order to report on the association's work; however it grew into a separate project for the association. *Atinati* is currently incorporated into a radio network created under the auspices of Radio *Tavisupleba* (the network also includes the following radio stations: *Harmonia* from Poti, *Dzveli Kalaki* (Old City) from Kutaisi, *Hereti* from Lagodekhi, and *Mtsvane Talgha* (Green Wave) from Meskheta-Akhaltzikhe), and is a co-founder and a member of the *Georgian Independent Broadcasters' Association*. Radio *Atinati* par-

ticipates in various projects run by international donor organisations and has repeatedly received grants from these organisations. Grants received from the Eurasia Foundation, IREX, and the Open Society – Georgia Foundation have helped it to renovate and enhance its technical capacity, organise its airtime and improve its employees' skills.

The radio station broadcasts 24 hours a day, and almost all of its airtime is filled with its own programmes. One of the station's primary goals is to report on the work of the Atinati association, and also more generally on the whole non-governmental sector in the region. It has a programme called 'Mesame Sectoris Matsne' (Third Sector Messenger), in which representatives of non-governmental organisations speak live about projects that are ongoing or have already been implemented. The programme explains what non-governmental organisations are, how their work conforms to current legislation, how to obtain assistance from international organisations, what a grant means, etc. Over the years, this programme's advice has enabled many enterprising groups to develop into non-governmental organisations; there are now about 300 non-governmental organisations in Zugdidi alone.

*Atinati* pays great attention to the problems of refugees. It has a special section dedicated to these issues, in which a lawyer and a psychologist give advice to listeners who call in. Joint programmes are prepared with Abkhaz counterparts, the most remarkable of which is a series called *Radiodgiurebi* (Radio Diaries), which broadcasts pieces by both Georgian and Abkhaz journalists and stories on post-war relations. The radio station has two programmes in Russian, called: *Ruski chas* (Russian Hour) and *Chas Frantsuzskoi Muziki* (French Music Hour). A separate series of programmes is dedicated to human rights and their social dimension. *Atinati* also had a religious programme, called *Dialogi Modzgvartan* (Dialogue with a Pastor), in which a pastor from the Orthodox Christian Church spoke about different aspects of religion and answered questions live. Other religious confessions have not shown an interest in preparing their own programmes. Nevertheless, issues relating to religious minorities, and particularly to cases of their rights being violated, are raised on programmes dedicated to human rights.

*Atinati* has its own news programme, which is broadcast ten times a day and is a survey of local, national and world news. *Atinati*'s airtime also includes *Tribune of Georgia*, a programme prepared jointly by radio stations who are part of the Radio *Independence* network.

The association uses its own resources – in terms of both technical facilities and journalists – to ensure the radio station continues to operate. *Internews* and other international organisations assist the station in training its personnel. These organisations invite *Atinati* employees to seminars and trainings for journalists every year.

Radio *Atinati*'s technical facilities include four computers, three tape recorders, an audio mixer and a fully equipped studio. It broadcasts across the Zugdidi, Khobi, and Tsalendjikha districts, part of the Poti district, and the Gali and Ochamchire districts in Abkhazia. Almost all of the Association's employees are involved in preparing its programmes.

### **Radio *Erani***

This radio station was founded by the Community Development Resource Centre – Erani Foundation in 1999; it is not an individual legal entity and aims to promote the organisation's range of activities.

The Erani Foundation, which initially operated under the name VTJC under the auspices of the American organisation IRC, works in three basic directions: agriculture, professional training, and media development. The media development programme was developed in 2001. It began by setting up a television studio, followed in 2003 by the establishment of a radio station. Radio *Erani* was founded on the basis of the Zugdidi radio station *Eurasia*; the foundation leased *Eurasia*'s frequency and started broadcasting its own programmes. The station has been operating under the name *Erani* since 2004.

Radio *Erani*'s audience is young people of about 18-25 years of age. It provides information on the foundation's activities, while at the same time being a musical and entertainment channel. It does not avoid politics at election time. During the 2003 and 2004 elections, it was open both to political parties and observers from non-governmental organisations who were monitoring the elections.

The radio station has no income source of its own; it depends completely on funds allotted to the Erani Foundation to ensure coverage of different project implementation phases. *Erani* 's technical capacity is small: several computers, a tape-recorder, an audio mixer, a telephone switch-in synchroniser and a transmitter. As well as Zugdidi, it also broadcasts in the lowland area of the Samegrelo region and along the Abkhazian coastline.

The station's permanent staff include five announcers and one technical engineer; foundation employees take part in preparing programmes when necessary.

## **Tsalenjikha**

### **Newspaper *Egrisi***

The *Egrisi* newspaper is the heir to the publishing body of the Tsalenjikha District Executive Committee of the Communist Party. Initially it was called *Mokhandeshi Khonari* (Worker's Voice), and then subsequently changed names several times, became *Stalineli* (Stalinist), then *Komunizmis Droshit* (With the Banner of Communism), and finally *Egrisi* since the 1990s. The paper is not registered as an individual legal entity and is a body of the local administration. Its dependence on the local administration is the result of its 'bitter' experience of independence in the early 1990s. The newspaper could not support itself at that time and became subordinate to the district administration.

The paper mostly focuses on reporting the activities of the local administration; in fact, virtually all its pages are dedicated to publishing accounts of the administration's meetings and decisions. Nevertheless, quite often the paper comes to oppose the local administration and its representatives. For example, an article about members of parliament visiting the district said that they were only taken to meetings in places where people would not criticise them or express discontent. This publication caused indignation among the local government and representatives of the United National Movement. The same reaction followed an article describing the social situation and the lack of transparency in distributing social welfare. But such instances are isolated and uncommon.

The newspaper is completely dependent on the local budget for funding (3000 lari a year). *Egrisi* gets no advertisement orders. Tsalenjikha is an agrarian district and there is no advertising market. Private announcements bring a certain amount of revenue, though this sum is not sufficient for the paper to operate independently.

*Egrisi* has no technical capacity of its own. Typing and pagination take place in Zugdidi, and it is printed in Tbilisi on A3 format paper. It has four pages and is issued every second week. Its print run ranges between 500-600 copies, 400 of which are distributed among subscribers, with the rest going on sale for 50 tetri.

The newspaper has seven employees: an editor-in-chief, an assistant editor-in-chief, an executive secretary, a proof-reader and three journalists.

### ***Jikha Television Company***

This television company was established in 1999 by the youth association *Jikha* and is not a separate legal entity.

*Jikha* fills its airtime with programmes from Tbilisi-based television company *Rustavi 2*. Its own broadcasting consists of two hours – from 20:00 to 21:00 and from 22:00 to 23:00. This time is filled with news, musical and entertainment sections, and a children's programme prepared with its own resources. Private announcements, which are the company's major source of revenue, take up a large share of its airtime. In addition, the company transmits sessions from the administration and has live broadcasts of meetings with guests. It prepares a weekly analytical programme, the content of which is determined by significant events taking place in the district throughout the week.

The company has a small technical base: one computer, one camera and two video recorders. *Jikha* has its own transmitter, thanks to which it can relay its programmes across Tsalenjikha.

The company has five employees: a director, a technical director, one journalist, one TV presenter and one cameraman.

## **Chkhorotsku**

### ***Kolkheti 89 Television Company***

This company was established in 1989 by four private individuals on an equal basis. *Kolkheti 89* is a limited company. Until 1993 it operated without problems, but there was a break in its broadcasting between 1993 and 1995. When political stability returned, this enabled the company to renew its broadcasting.

The company is a member of the *Georgian Independent Television and Radio Broadcasters' Association*, and as such it closely cooperates with Tbilisi-based television company *Rustavi 2*, relaying *Rustavi 2* programmes to fill its airtime. Its own programmes are transmitted from 8 to 9 in the morning and from 10 to 11 in the evening; the rest of the airtime is filled with programmes from its partner company.

*Kolkheti 89*'s two hours of broadcasting consist of a news programme (30 minutes), commercials prepared by the company itself, private announcements and analytical and entertainment programmes. The news programme reports exclusively on local events and stands out for its balanced position and its efficiency. With backing from *Internews*, the company reported live from its studio during the elections in 2003 and 2004.

Traditionally, *Kolkheti 89*'s relationship with the local government was tense. Programmes revealing a lack of transparency in the administration's work and unclear management of funds were followed by verbal harassment and its power being cut off, which caused gaps in broadcasting. After the Revolution, relations changed for the better, as the people who came to power were previously in opposition and were thus well disposed to the company. The company has therefore softened its previously fervent criticism.

*Kolkheti 89* has kept all the film it has ever shot and has an impressive and valuable archive depicting significant events of the civil war period.

The television company's technical capacities include a private mast and a transmitter, an assembly desk, two computers, one digital and two Super VHS cameras, and a generator. As well as the Chkhorotsku district, it broadcasts across the Tsalendjikha, Martvili, Senaki and Khobi districts and their adjacent areas. *Kolkheti 89*'s broadcasting license is valid until 2009.

The company has 20 employees: a general director, a director, an accountant, a programme manager, a chief technical engineer, four assistant station-masters, head of the news department, four journalists, three cameramen, head of the advertising department and two advertising agents.

## **Radio A+**

*Radio A+* has been functioning since 2004 and is not a legal entity. It was founded by a group of teenagers who managed to create programmes in amateur conditions and relay programmes from the Patriarchate radio station, *Iveria*. A+ transmits its own programmes for two hours of its air-time. These programmes focus on issues such as religion, science, medicine and other spheres.

The radio station is kept in operation by three young volunteers, using only a computer and a hi-fi. A+ does not have a broadcasting license and relays only across Chkhorotsku.

## **Khobi**

### **Newspaper *Khobis Moambe* (Khobi Messenger)**

This newspaper is the successor of the publishing body of the Communist Party Khobi District Executive Committee, which was established in 1932. Initially it was called *Sotsializmis Mshenebeli* (Builder of Socialism), but in the 1990s it was renamed *Samegrelo*. The newspaper has been called *Khobis Moambe* since 2003. It is published by the Khobi district administration, and its contents are determined by the administration's interests.

The newspaper does not have its own income and is dependent on the district budget; the local administration allots 230 lari annually for expenses. It also gets a small amount of income from private announcements.

Most of the newspaper's articles deal with the work of the local government; the paper publishes announcements, decisions and bylaws passed by the local administration. Articles about existing problems in the district present the administration's position; the administration comments on the power supply, drinking water, pension and welfare issues but does not go beyond simply stating these problems.

The paper's technical facilities include: three tape recorders and one photo camera. Typing and pagination take place in Kutaisi. The newspaper is in A3 format, is printed on four pages and is published every second week. It has a print run of 500 copies, 400 of which are distributed among subscribers, with the rest sold at retail for 25 tetri each.

*Khobis Moambe* has eight employees on its roster: an editor, an assistant editor, an executive secretary, a proof-reader, an accountant and three reporters.

### **Newspaper *Kalaki Khobi* (Town of Khobi)**

This newspaper was established as a limited company by the local administration and the Sakrebulo with all 100% of its shares owned by the State.

The first issue of *Kalaki Khobi* came out in January 2003. Its editorial policy is defined in collaboration with the local administration and the Sakrebulo; because of this, the analytical side of the newspaper lacks independence. Nevertheless, it does not refrain from writing about burn-

ing social problems, such as difficulties with the water and power supply. The newspaper's style are more like essays, as its column headings also testify. Its traditional columns are: *Khobeli Tbiliselebi* (Tbilisi citizens who are natives of Khobi), which introduces doctors, businessmen, scientists and cultural workers who were born in Khobi but are living and working in Tbilisi; *Gvarishviloba* (Noble Ancestry), which contains stories about distinguished Khobi citizens from the past or present; *Tvitmmartveloba* (Self-government), which portrays the history of local villages and the work of their Sakrebulo, as well as general issues related to self-government; *Gvatslmosili Adamianebi* (Worthy People), which writes about outstanding Georgian public figures; *Mesame Seqtori* (The Third Sector), which describes the work of non-governmental organisations in the Khobi district and more generally across the whole of Samegrelo. Every second issue also has a religious page, which contains the pastor's answers to the congregation's questions, as well as essays about religious objects of worship and information about approaching holidays and the lives of the saints.

The Gamgeoba and the Sakrebulo decide jointly on the newspaper's funding; their budget does not allocate a concrete sum for its publication, so each issue is financed individually. Because of this funding system, publication is often delayed or completely cancelled. The newspaper has no other source of income, though it also publishes some advertisements, predominantly private announcements (obituaries and congratulatory messages).

In order to improve its financial condition, the newspaper is trying to attract subscribers, though with little notable progress so far. For the time being, most of its subscribers are people working in the district administration and the village Sakrebulo.

The newspaper's overall technical facilities consist of three tape recorders and one photo camera. Typing, pagination and printing all take place in Tbilisi. The paper is in A3 format, takes up 10 pages and is issued weekly. It has a circulation of 1,000 copies; 500 of these are distributed to subscribers. Its retail price is 20 tetri, which does not even cover printing costs.

*Kalaki Khobi* has six employees: a director, an editor, an assistant editor, an accountant, a special reporter, and a photographer.



## Senaki

### Newspaper *Kolkheti*

The newspaper is the heir of *Komuna* (Commune), a weekly body established by the Senaki (Soviet-era Tskhakaya) District Executive Committee of the Communist Party in 1923. Later it was called *Mtliani Kolektivizacia* (Overall Collectivization), then *Avangardi* (Vanguard), and finally *Kolkheti*. It was founded by a group of journalists and the Gamgeoba with equal shares. *Kolkheti* is a limited company.

The newspaper receives 6,000 laris a year from the Gamgeoba. Although it has some advertisements and private announcements, the sums received from this source and from sales and subscription revenues are not enough even to fully reimburse its employees.

The paper's contents fully reflect the demands and interests of the Gamgeoba. It largely just publishes documents and articles about the administration's work. The newspaper also has essays on the region's history and distinguished Senaki residents, and interviews with the district intelligentsia and government representatives.

Technical capacity of *Kolkheti* is: a computer, a typewriter, and a tape-recorder. Typing and pagination and printing take place in Kutaisi. It is printed on A3 format paper, occupies four pages and is published irregularly, three times a month on average. It has a circulation of 500 copies, 300 of which are distributed among subscribers; the retail price is 25 tetri a copy.

*Kolkheti* has four employees: an editor, a reporter, a computer specialist, and an accountant.

### Newspaper *Mrtsamsi* (Credo)

This newspaper is the publishing body of the non-governmental organisation The All-Georgian Association for Human Rights and Prisoners' Social Security and was established in 1995. Initially, it was published in Tbilisi, but the government tried to inhibit its work because of its political standpoint. Like its founder organisation, *Mrtsamsi*, it was perceived as a radical group supporting the first president of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who was ousted as a result of the civil war. The newspaper has been published in Senaki since 2001.

The newspaper published a number of articles which were of social and political importance and were especially significant for the national reconcili-

ation process. At that time, the newspaper published interviews with Akaki Eliava – a colonel who was hiding in the woods in Samegrelo – and members of his detachment. The newspaper's editors expressed particular concern about the conditions in which President Zviad Gamsakhurdia's imprisoned supporters were kept and about violations of their rights. Afterwards, when the Georgian Government improved legislation and took concrete steps to improve the situation, it managed to reduce the antagonism resulting from the civil war and to reconcile marginal groups supporting the ex-president Gamsakhurdia; as a result, *Mrtsamsi*'s central themes started to become less important. Since the Rose Revolution, the newspaper turned into a home for ethnic-nationalistic rhetoric. Its vehement radical nationalism was then compounded by religious extremism, and today most of the articles it publishes are dedicated to preaching intolerance towards religious minorities.

The newspaper receives financial support from the editor's friends and private entities engaged in business activities. It is important to note that *Mrtsamsi* receives stable funding and is published regularly. The publisher has his personal considerations and flatly refuses to publish advertisements and private announcements.

The newspaper has no technical capacity of its own; typing, pagination and printing all take place in Tbilisi. *Mrtsamsi* is an A3 format, 12-page paper and is published monthly with a circulation of 500 copies; 100 of these are distributed free of charge to armed supporters of ex-president Gamsakhurdia who remain in prison. The retail price is 50 tetri.

Four people work permanently on the preparation of *Mrtsamsi*: the editor and three reporters; however, most articles are supplied by activists of the All-Georgian Association for Human Rights and Prisoners' Social Security, and people ideologically close to this group.

### ***Egrisi Television Company***

This company was established in 1995 by a private individual and is a limited company.

The company's only source of income is obituaries and congratulatory messages; it has never had any real advertisement orders, which can probably be explained by the lack of an advertising market in the district. *Egrisi* has never received any support from any international organisation, except for regular orders for social advertisements from *Internews*, which is a serious source of support for the company.

In such financial conditions, *Egrisi* has problems operating. The company fills its airtime by relaying programmes from Tbilisi-based television company *Rustavi 2*. *Egrisi*'s own programmes consist only of a 15-minute news programme and private announcements, which take up just two of its 24 hours of airtime. The news programme has a restricted format and covers only events occurring in the district's administrative centre and adjacent villages; most of its news consists of interviews and comments from representatives of the local authorities, rather than topics that have been independently identified and prepared by its journalists.

The television company's technical facilities include one computer, two video cameras, six video recorders and two tape recorders. *Egrisi* has its own mast and transmitter, thanks to which it can broadcast across the Senaki district. The company's broadcasting license is valid until 2014.

The company has eight employees: a general director, a director, and six journalists.

## **Abasha**

### **The newspaper *Abashis Matsne* (Abasha Messenger)**

The newspaper is the heir of the publishing body of the Abasha District Executive Committee of the Communist Party, *Sabtchota Sopeli* (Soviet Village), which was established in 1931. In the 1990s it was called *Abasha*, and it was then renamed *Abashis Matsne* (Abasha Messenger) in early 2000. The newspaper was founded by the local administration and belongs to the State.

The local administration determines both the contents of the newspaper and its level of funding. At one point, the paper was not published for a while because the administration had excluded this line from the budget. For the past three years, however, *Abashis Matsne* has been published on a stable basis. The local administration allots 100 lari to the editors to print each issue of the newspaper. This low level of funding negatively affects its periodicity, its size and its circulation.

The paper's contents are almost entirely filled with reports on the work of the local administration, and the very small amount of space that is left for other information is filled with congratulation messages and obituaries.

*Abashis Matsne* has no technical facilities of its own and the complete publication cycle takes place in Kutaisi. The paper is printed on A3 format paper, has four pages and is published twice a month with a circulation of

200. Virtually no copies are sold; it is distributed entirely among people working in the local administration structures.

*Abashis Matsne* has three employees: an editor, an assistant editor and a proof-reader.

## **Martvili**

### **Newspaper *Martvilis Moambe* (Martvili Messenger)**

This newspaper was published from 1990 under the name *Gamgeobis Matsne* (Administration's Messenger); it was not registered as a legal entity. Since registering as a limited company in 2003 it has been called *Martvilis Moambe* (Martvili Messenger). Its founder is the district administration (Gamgeoba); the newspaper belongs to the State.

The paper depends on financial support from the local government to operate. It is not always possible to allocate money to the newspaper, as a result of which *Martvilis Moambe* is often not published at regular intervals. The paper's contents reflects the demands and interests of the local authorities. Mostly it just publishes decisions and bylaws adopted by the local government and reports on its activities. The newspaper also has articles dealing with religious, cultural and sporting life in the district; it has essays about the district's past and present, about distinguished Martvili residents, and representatives of the local intelligentsia.

The paper is distributed to employees of local administration bodies; the price of the newspaper is deducted from their salaries by the local administration.

The newspaper has no technical capacity of its own. Typing, pagination and printing all take place in Kutaisi. It is in A3 format, has eight pages and is issued monthly. It has a print run of 500, 300 of which are distributed among subscribers; the retail price is 50 tetri.

*Martvilis Moambe* has seven employees: an editor-in-chief, an assistant editor-in-chief, four reporters and an accountant.

## **Poti**

### **Newspaper *Potis Droeba* (The Poti Era)**

This newspaper was founded in 2003 by a non-governmental organisation, Aisi. It is not an individual legal entity and its activities are not commercially driven.

The paper has no income of its own; it survives on donations from local businessmen and organisations. Because the newspaper is not commercial, it does not publish advertisements or private announcements. *Potis Droeba* has a very close relationship with a company called Sophmari, whose head is the spouse of the former Mayor of Poti. The paper receives regular funding from the aforementioned organisation, and its editorial office is situated in this company's office building.

The paper reports on public and political issues, the work of the local authorities, and what is happening in local authority bodies. In 2003-2004, the paper's stance promoted the mayor's interests, which were in sharp opposition to the Sakrebulo, which accused the head of the city of exceeding his responsibilities and committing economic crimes. This opposition ended when the mayor was defeated, and the newspaper was soon engulfed in a crisis.

Besides politics, other topics that interest *Potis Droeba* include social and health issues, ecology, crime, and the city's crime and sports news. The paper also has a children's section called 'Patarebis Nobati' (Present for Children).

*Potis Droeba* has never received any technical or financial assistance from international donor organisations, nor is it involved in the network of trainings aimed at developing editorial skills or in courses to develop and perfect the journalistic profession.

The paper's technical facilities, which were donated by supporting businessmen, include one computer, one printer, and a tape recorder. Typing and pagination of the newspaper take place locally, but it is printed in Tbilisi. It is in A3 format, has eight pages and is published twice a month. The newspaper is not sold; it is distributed among local government organisations free of charge.

*Potis Droeba* has four employees: an editor, an executive secretary, a pagination expert and a journalist.

### **Newspaper *Poti***

This newspaper was established in 2001 by a non-governmental organisation, the Freedom and Democratic Public Centre. A year later the newspaper was registered as a limited company.

The aforementioned non-governmental organisation is predominantly involved in implementing anti-corruption projects. One of its objectives is

to ensure media talks about the current situation and to inform society about the work it has implemented. To this end, it started publishing *Poti* and began preparing a series of programmes for local television. The nature of its activities meant that the newspaper had a complicated relationship with the local government, which culminated with its office being raided and its equipment being seized.

Once the leaders of the organisation that founded the paper were elected in the Assembly of Elected Officials, *Poti* became a mouthpiece of the Assembly of Elected Officials, promoting its policies in its battle with the local mayor. But after the mayor lost his job, *Poti* and *Potis Droeba* (which was supporting the mayor) both lost their function and importance.

*Poti* has received assistance from the Eurasia Foundation and the Open Society – Georgia Foundation on several occasions; donations from local businessmen and sales revenues (the newspaper sells very well) add to the newspaper's income.

The paper does not only report on political and economic problems. It also has columns on the work of the city's communal services, and on cultural and sporting life. There are also entertainment pages with jokes, tests and crosswords.

The paper's technical facilities include four computers, two printers, five tape recorders and one digital photo camera. Typing and pagination take place in Poti, but it is printed in Tbilisi. *Poti* is in A3 format, has eight pages and is issued weekly with a circulation of 1,000. The newspaper has 300 subscribers; the retail price is 50 tetri a copy.

*Poti* has nine employees: an editor, an assistant editor, four journalists, two technical workers and an accountant.

### **Newspaper *Potis Moambe* (Poti Messenger)**

This newspaper is the successor of the Communist Party Poti City Executive Committee publishing body established in 1921. Initially it was called *Mushis Khma* (Worker's Voice). The newspaper became independent under the law on the press, adopted in 1992, and was renamed *Potis Moambe*. *Potis Moambe* is a limited company. It was founded by five people, but now there are only three, one of which is the majority shareholder after the two founders that left gave him their shares.

Assistance from international organisations has played a great role in shaping *Potis Moambe* as an independent organisation. In 1995, *Potis*

*Moambe* received a grant from the Open Society – Georgia Foundation to help develop transparent local government. The newspaper also received a grant from the Eurasia Foundation aimed for the same purpose.

In 2004, the newspaper had to suspend publication for four months, because financial difficulties forced the paper to restructure. The paper failed to attract the support of international organisations during this period, but the editors found a way out by mobilizing their own funds and changing the format of the paper. They decided not to print the paper in a different city and started printing on their own risograph. The paper switched from A3 to A4 format, and the number of pages was reduced.

*Potis Moambe*'s editorial staff plan and control its content. This often provokes the discontent of the local authorities. *Potis Moambe* displays a balanced attitude in reporting issues relating to politics and the work of the local administration; it does not violate the norms of journalistic ethics. For precisely this reason, when there was a clash between the Mayor's office and the Sakrebulo, both parties were dissatisfied with the newspaper and accused it of being biased.

The paper only publishes analytical articles on local issues; for national and world news, it reprints articles from the Internet or the central press, indicating its sources. Besides political and economic issues, other local issues which the paper reports on include crime, health care, ecology, groups without social protection, culture and sports. A separate page is devoted to human rights, including religious rights. In this respect, the newspaper cooperates closely with local Christian communities and non-governmental organisations.

The paper's main source of income are the computer and printing centre which it operates and revenues received from advertisements and private announcements. Print sales also add to revenues, though they are insufficient for the paper to function fully.

The paper's technical facilities include eight computers, a risograph, six tape recorders, one digital and one ordinary photo camera. Typing, pagination and printing all take place in the editorial office using the office's own resources. The paper is in A4 format; it has 12 pages, and is published twice a week with a print run of 1,000. All copies of the paper are sold at retail; the price is 50 tetri a copy.

*Potis Moambe* has 13 employees on its roster: an editor-in-chief, two editors, an assistant editor, head of the computer centre and his assistant, an accountant and six part-time journalists.

## **Newspaper *Rezume***

This newspaper was founded in 2003 by a limited company, Benefice (Benefit Performance). It is not an individual legal entity but one of this organisation's core activities.

Most of the newspaper's articles focus on social and political issues. It is not uncommon for the newspaper to display a less than balanced attitude. During the clash between the Mayor's office and the Sakrebulo, the newspaper openly supported one side (the Sakrebulo), while commenting in detail on statements made by the other side.

Besides political and economic issues, the paper touches on every aspect of everyday life in the town, such as persistent problems with sanitation, ecology, crime, and the welfare and health services.

As well as local news, the newspaper publishes information about current national and world events which it selects from the Internet.

To operate, *Resume* depends on funding from the company Benefice. Revenues received from sales and commercials are not sufficient for the newspaper to function independently.

The paper's technical facilities include two computers, three tape recorders and a photo camera. Typing and pagination take place locally, but it is printed in Tbilisi on A3 format paper. It has eight pages, and is published weekly with a print run of 500. The retail price is 50 tetri a copy.

The newspaper has six employees: editor-in-chief, an executive secretary, an accountant and three journalists.

## **Newspaper *Potis Utskebani* (Poti Gazette)**

This newspaper has existed since 1993. It was founded by the Poti Mayor's office, but later it became the joint body of the Mayor's office and the Sakrebulo, and was registered as a limited company. The paper changed owner in 2002 when it was passed over to the Property Management Agency.

The change of owners precipitated the newspaper's financial decline. Where previously it was funded by the Mayor's office and Sakrebulo from the local budget, the new owner refuses to do the same. As well as denying the newspaper guaranteed funding, it does not even disburse money to publish its own information, on the grounds that the newspaper institutionally represents its own publishing body.



The newspaper's basic function is to report the work of the local government and to publish official information from the city administration's different bodies, predominantly lists of objects for privatisation and other information from the Property Management Agency.

Apart from this information, the newspaper also publishes articles on everyday problems of the city under the heading "What troubles you, my town?" Articles published in this column deal with Poti's ecological, communal and sanitary problems. The paper also writes about religious issues; a great deal of its articles deal with Orthodox Christian and other Christian confessions, though it has a markedly intolerant attitude toward the latter.

The newspaper's technical facilities consist only of one computer and several tape recorders. typing, pagination and printing take place in the offset publishing house in Poti. It is in A3 format, takes up four ages and is published weekly with a circulation of 500. The retail price is 40 tetri per copy.

The newspaper has 10 employees: editor-in-chief, an assistant editor, an executive secretary, a head of information department, three journalists, two technical workers and an accountant.

### **Newspaper *Martali Tribuna* (Just Tribune)**

This newspaper was founded in 2002 by a private individual; it is a limited company.

The newspaper's editors determine and plan its content independently of the local authorities and different political groups. The paper tries to report on the widest possible range of problems, focusing mostly on dubious political and economic deals. It should be mentioned that *Martali Tribuna* managed to keep a balanced position in the conflict between the Mayor of Poti and the Sakrebulo. The paper also finds space for economic articles, particularly those relating to Poti Port and the relationship between different transport companies and to the privatisation of various sorts of businesses. Like other newspapers issued in Poti, *Martali Tribuna* devotes a large amount of space to social issues.

Its relationship with the local government is not particularly tense, though some of its publications has irritated the latter and even led to threats. For example, it published investigative articles about the Port and related action by certain groups within the government.

The newspaper's editorial office has not received any grants from international organisations, though its editor and journalists regularly attend

trainings organised by the Eurasia Foundation and IREX designed to improve journalistic skills. They have participated in seminars on investigative journalism prepared by the *Rustavi 2* group (Akaki Gogichaishvili, the 60 minutes programme). Participation in this sort of activities greatly helps *Martali Tribuna* to improve the contents of the paper. However, the fact that they did not participate in programmes on management and capacity building has had a certain impact on the newspaper.

The revenues of the newspaper come from print sales, advertisements and private announcements.

The newspaper's technical facilities include two computers, one photo camera, and two tape recorders. Typing and pagination take place locally, but printing is done in Kutaisi. It is on A3 paper, has eight pages and is published weekly with a circulation of 1000. The retail price is 50 tetri per copy.

The newspaper has six employees: a director, a commercial director, an editor, a technical worker, an accountant and a journalist.

### **Newspaper *Potis Navsadgureli* (Pori Port Worker)**

The newspaper is the heir of *Potis Musha* newspaper, which was established in 1931 by the Georgian Maritime Union and the Poti City Committee of the Communist Party. It has been called *Potis Navsadgureli* since 1995. The newspaper is published by the port of Poti.

In accordance with its charter, the newspaper's function is to safeguard the interests and labour rights of those working in the port infrastructure, although it does not belong to any trade union and is independent of their control. Articles for publication have to be agreed with the head of Poti Port and the head of the Public Relations Department, so it does not portray the real picture regarding workers' social and labour conditions. For example, independent media in Poti and in the capital city both started to report at the same time on a case of negligence where safety regulations determined by the labour code had been violated, which occurred while reloading aluminium dioxide in wharf number eight; in contrast, *Potis Navsadgureli* attempted to prove that aluminium dioxide was safe. It should be noted that the trade unions did not make a single statement on this issue.

As well as publishing statements issued by the port administration and stating the administration's official position, the newspaper also publishes articles on successful workers and former socialist labour heroes. There are also letters from port workers. These letters are a positive appraisal of

changes that have already been implemented or are waiting to happen. Strangely enough, no mention is made about redundancies.

The newspaper is funded by the port's administration and in fact there is no need for additional revenues.

The newspaper has no technical capacity of its own. It uses the technical facilities of the port administration. It is printed on A4 format paper, has four pages and is published weekly with a circulation of 120. The newspaper is distributed among the port employees free of charge.

*Potis Navsadgureli* has four employees: an editor, an executive secretary and two reporters.

### **Television company *Metskhre Talgha* (Wave Nine) / Radio *Harmonia* (Harmony)**

The television company *Metskhre Talgha* was established in 2000 and began broadcasting in 2001. Its owners are two private entities holding 67% and 33% of its shares respectively. It is registered as a limited company.

The company is a member of the *Georgian Independent Broadcasters' Association*, and within this framework it cooperates closely with Tbilisi-based television company *Rustavi 2*. This relationship helps the company to fill its 24 hours of airtime: the company's own programmes take up only two hours of its overall airtime. Twice a day the company transmits a 15-minute-long news programme, and at the end of the week it has an analytical programme summing up the whole week. The rest of the day's airtime is filled with 5 or 10-minute live interviews with invited guests, advertisements and private announcements.

The company has received assistance from international donors several times, among them a grant from the Eurasia Foundation in 2001 during local government elections, with which it purchased equipment for live reporting. This enabled the company to organize TV debates. In the period preceding the Ajara revolution in May 2004 it purchased new transmitters with the assistance of *Rustavi 2* and IREX, which enhanced the company's transmission range. Specifically, this meant that *Rustavi 2* programmes that had previously been banned within the Autonomous Republic of Ajara could now be watched safely. The company received a grant from IREX which was spent on preparing talk shows about environmental conditions in the Samegrelo region. As well as direct assistance, journalists also benefit tremendously from participating in programmes run by international

organisations aimed at perfecting their professional skills. In this respect, the company cooperates actively with IREX and Internews, which regularly invite company representatives to their seminars and trainings.

The company's relations with the authorities were tense both before the Revolution and for a certain period after. In the pre-Revolution period, tensions were caused by the fact that the television channel provided a serious platform for opposition parties in the region. After the Revolution, it also clashed with the authorities for its role in their conflict with the Mayor of the city. *Metskhre Talgha* has dedicated many reports to the wasteful spending of budgetary funds and dubious relations between businessmen and the mayor's office. This critical stance resulted in unidentified armed people stealing the company's transmitters, generator and accumulators from protected territory on the Poti mast. Currently, its relationship with the government is normal. Changes in the Mayor's office are one explanation for this. Another reason is probably the fact that one of the company's founders has moved to work in the Samegrelo- Zemo Svaneti regional administration.

Radio *Harmonia* is run by the *Metskhre Arkhi* television company. It was established in 2002 on the basis of the radio station *Poti Plus* (which was founded in 1998), after *Metskhre Arkhi* bought a 68% majority of *Poti Plus*'s shares.

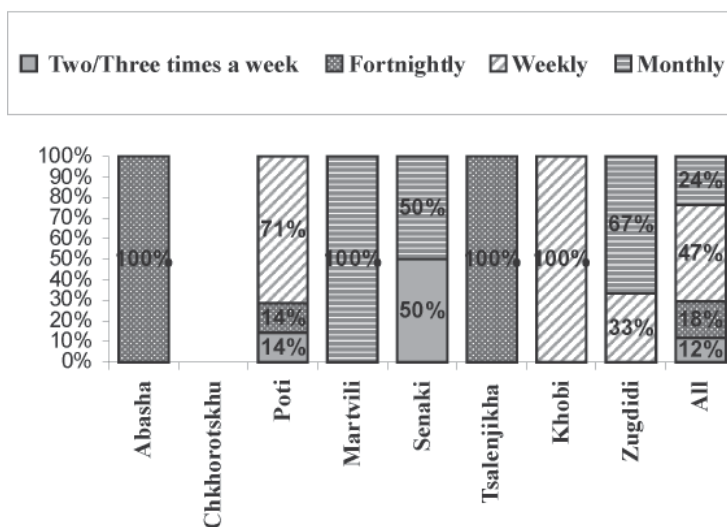
*Harmonia* broadcasts from 8 in the morning until 2 at night. It is part of the Georgian Radio network created under the aegis of Radio Independence. The Georgian Radio Network also includes radio stations such as *Atinati* from Zugdidi, *Dzveli Kalaki* from Kutaisi, *Mtsvane Talga-Meskheti* from Akhaltsikhe, and *Hereti* from Lagodekhi. Within the framework of this network, once a week *Harmonia* broadcasts a news programme and a series of debates called *Sakartvelos Tribuna* (Rostrum of Georgia), which links up with partner radio stations. The radio transmits its own news programme three times a day. The rest of its airtime is taken up by music and commercials.

Radio *Harmonia*'s major source of income is funding received from *Metskhre Talga*. Because the local advertising market is very thin, it cannot yet function independently.

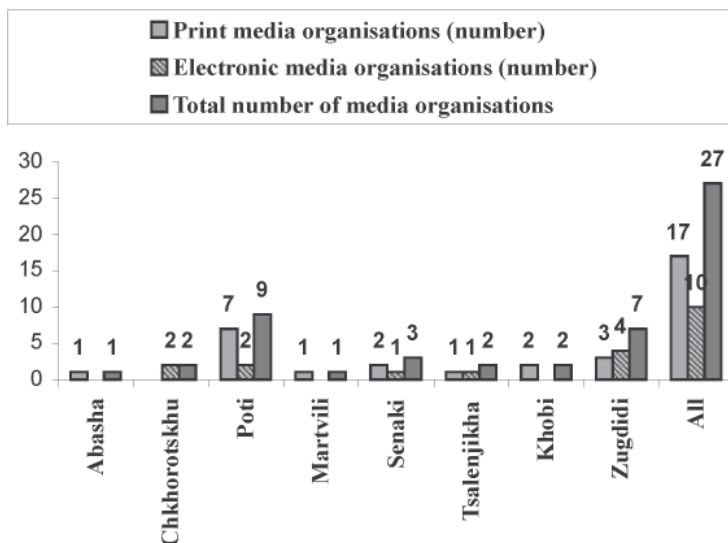
Both the radio and television companies have good quality, modern equipment. Their working conditions are good for regional electronic media. The coverage zones of both the radio and the television company include a large part of the Samegrelo district and part of the Ajara Autonomous Republic.

*Metskhre Talga* has 20 employees; 12 of them are involved in administration, the rest are journalists and cameramen. Radio *Harmonia* has eight employees: a director, five disc jockeys, and three journalists in its news section.

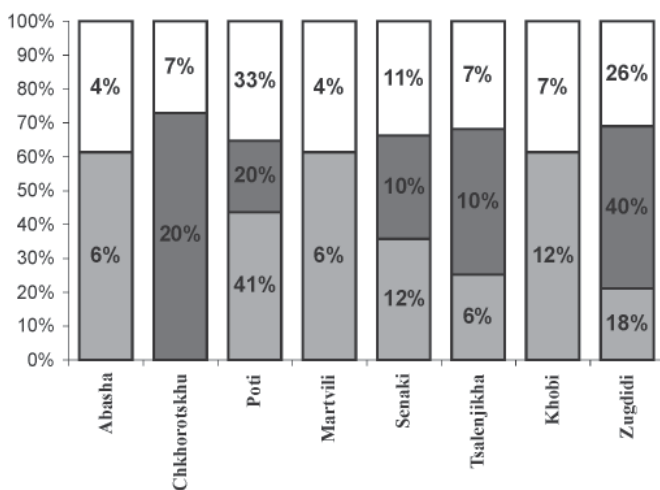
### Publication intervals of print media organisations in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti by district



### Number of media organisations in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti by district

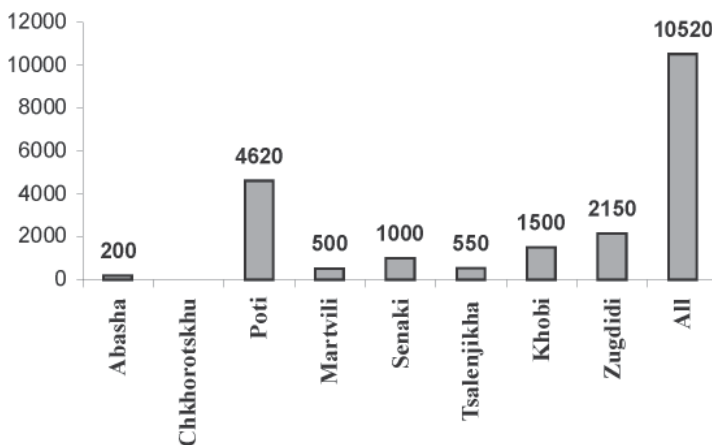


### Percentage distribution of media organisations in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti by district

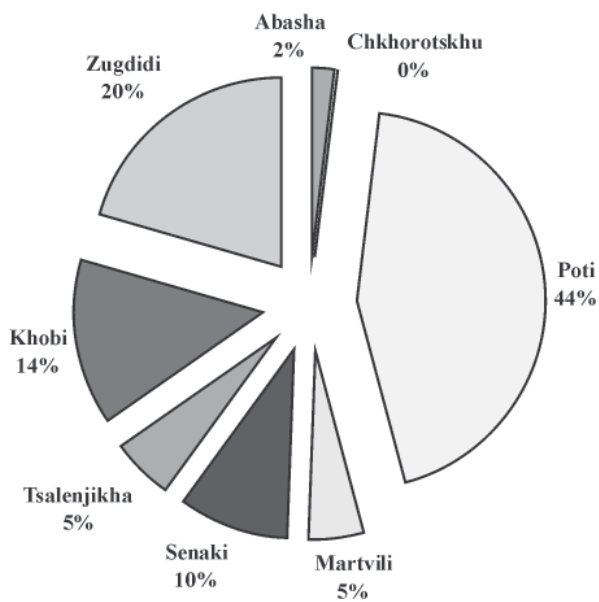


☐ Media organisations  
☒ Electronic media organisations  
☒ Print media organisations

### Overall circulation of print media in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti by district



**Pie chart showing overall circulation of print media  
in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti by district**



# GURIA<sup>1</sup>

Guria covers 2,9% of Georgian territory; its population is 3.2% of Georgia's overall population<sup>2</sup>; 97% of people living in this region are Georgians and 3% are representatives of other ethnic groups. Guria's macroeconomic indicators, with regards to its domestic product index (0.43), are the worst among Georgia's eleven regions.

## **The Specific Features of the Region and their Impact on Media Development**

In terms of economic development, Guria is one of the most underdeveloped regions of Georgia. It is an agricultural area. During the Soviet period the main industries in the region were tea and citrus plant growing. When the Soviet Union broke up, Guria's economic infrastructure was also destroyed. Today, people in the region lead an economically self-sufficient life. Small businesses are mostly in food production and other light industry, while medium and large businesses are engaged predominantly in timber production and processing, and in the ferrous and non-ferrous scrap metal trade.

The majority of the population in Guria is below the poverty line. Economic and social problems in the region are compounded by the general crisis in the country and the impact this has on certain spheres of life, which is reflected in:

- Power shortages;
  - Damaged road and energy networks;
  - Serious crime;
  - Lack of transparency in local government structures;
  - Central and local government representatives with business interests, which often involve overtly criminal activities;
  - Opaque relations between private business and the state authorities;
- All of these factors certainly have an influence on the development of the local media and its efforts to define how it works:
- Permanent power shortages hinder the work of the local electronic media; in most cases their services cannot reach consumers.

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<sup>1</sup> This study of the Guria region was held on 29-31 August 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Outcomes of the 2002 census // State Department of Statistics. Tbilisi 2002



- The damaged road and energy networks delay the print media's work, as it prevents them both from dispatching and receiving information actively and efficiently, and from disseminating the final product in a timely manner;
- The difficult criminal situation in the region puts a further strain on the conditions in which local media representatives have to work, as they often come under pressure from criminal groups;
- The relationship with the local authorities is just as tense as it was before the Rose Revolution, primarily with regard to the issue of unrestricted access to public information; this intransigence should be ascribed to mere ignorance of administrative and civil laws rather than a deliberate desire to conceal information from the media;
- The Guria region has a small but very important health-resort and transport infrastructure. Both the business elite and representatives of central government structures are interested in privatising this recreation area and in the management of the Supsa oil terminal, which is located in the region. The local media is extremely active in its efforts to monitor income flows from this infrastructure and how revenues are dispersed; however it encounters resistance from the local authorities, which often includes threats to media representatives, and also cases of physical coercion.
- As noted above, medium and large businesses are in the scrap metal and timber processing industries. These businesses operate thanks to bargains reached with representatives of the local authorities. The local media is actively engaged in researching the possible and existing effects (both economic and ecological) of dismantling former agricultural processing plants and labelling them as scrap, and also the effects of felling woods. However, here too it again encounters serious resistance from both government structures and business circles. Not only is information concealed or misrepresented, but pressures are also exerted on journalists. However, there are still factors which diminish the impact of the aforementioned challenges:
- Compared to other regions in Georgia, people in Guria are more politically and socially active and express a greater demand to be informed.
- Cooperation with non-governmental organisations inside and outside the country helps the media to lessen the pressure exerted on it by authorities and business groups.
- By increasing periodicity and circulation, the print media compensates for the fact that power shortages make electronic media inefficient.

- Problems related to communications are partially overcome by means of broad non-formal and independent distribution networks built on the principle of mutual economic benefit.

Public interest and demand to be informed, which is markedly high in this economically underdeveloped region, determine the working style, direction and production levels of the local media.

## **Differences within the Region by Town**

Guria has three towns: Lanchkhuti, Ozurgeti and Chokhatauri. Chokhatauri has only one media organisation, while Lanchkhuti and Ozurgeti have four media organisations each.

All four organisations in Lanchkhuti are print media. Ozurgeti has two newspapers and two TV companies, and Chokhatauri has only one newspaper.

There is a notable imbalance between state and private media organisations in the region. Seven of the nine existing media organisations are private and only two are owned by the state. Three of the four newspapers in Lanchkhuti are independent and one belongs to the local government. Similarly, in Ozurgeti local authorities own only one of the two existing newspapers, and that only partially, because the newspaper has limited company status and was founded by the editorial staff jointly with the regional administration. The electronic media in Ozurgeti was private from the very outset and has remained so until the present day. The only newspaper in Chokhatauri was owned by the state; however, it was later privatised. Remarkably, the Chokhatauri newspaper is the only paper in Guria which is disseminated across the whole region.

Electronic media exists only in Ozurgeti; this may be the reason why the print media is relatively weak in this particular region. Television competes with the print media not only in supplying news but also from the point of view of effectiveness and accessibility of advertisement services. This also explains the fact that the Lanchkhuti print media is better developed than in Ozurgeti. Lanchkhuti has no television of its own to compete with the local newspapers.

## **Print Media**

Seven of the nine organisations in Guria are print media. Five of these are independent and have had steady print for several years now. It is worth

noting that notwithstanding the low purchasing capacity of the local population, newspapers published in Guria have the highest circulation of regional media all across Georgia. The successful development of an independent media in the region can be explained by the following:

- Society is both politically and socially constructive; the demand for unbiased information and, accordingly, for information sources independent of the state, is high;
- Unlike other regions (Ajara, Kakheti, Kvemo Kartli), where local authorities formed clan regimes, this did not happen in Guria, because the region has less economic potential and also because the influence of the Tbilisi-based political and economic elite was not strong enough. Guria thus had relatively better conditions for the development of civil society and an independent media;
- It was local civil society itself that catalysed the emergence of an independent print media. Most of the numerous non-governmental organisations in Guria published bulletins and newsletters, in which besides their own activities, they also reported about current events. Most newly recruited staff in the local independent media had previously worked for non-governmental organisations and already had publishing experience. The non-governmental sector helps the print media to improve its professional skills and develop different trends to this day.

The development of the local media has been greatly influenced by its relationships with the Tbilisi-based media and with non-governmental and international organisations operating in the capital. Every independent publication in Guria has regularly received grants from international donor organisations. This, undoubtedly, has stimulated both the financial and organisational growth of the independent print media. On the other hand, there is a growing demand for print media, these papers have good circulation, and they do not disappear once their funded projects finish, all of which suggests that these organisations have good editorial and marketing policies. In this respect, the print media acts in the following directions:

- They research the needs and interests of their customers, based on social surveys and letters received from readers. Consequently, their editorial policy is permanently being reviewed and the contents of articles improved;
- Their relationship with the authorities is also aimed at obtaining information which is in the public interest. The print media takes an uncompromising attitude towards so-called “forbidden” issues.

At the time when the print media was established, the environment in the region was truly competitive. Everybody therefore had to struggle to get publicity and to win and expand its audience. In this respect, the media has had considerable success; it has managed to create its own alternative networks to the inefficient state distribution network. Distributors receive a certain percentage from each sold issue. This increases their motivation to sell as many prints as possible.

## **Electronic Media**

Both electronic media organisations in Guria are private. Although both are registered in Ozurgeti, their signals are nevertheless relayed to a much larger area. The technical capacity of these media organisations enables them to become regional broadcasting companies. However, only one of them – the *Madi* TV company – seems to have such ambitions. This company has reporters both inside the Guria region and beyond, in Kobuleti and Poti.

The greatest challenge facing the local electronic media is a shortage of funds. The local economic infrastructure does not yield serious opportunities for a strong advertisement market. Private advertisements (congratulations and obituaries) are the company's basic source of income; at times it also receives some assistance from international donor organisations, and sometimes participates together with non-governmental organisations in different programmes, which adds to its income.

Another serious obstacle for the development of the electronic media in Guria is the lack of professionals in the field. This gap is partly filled through projects and trainings to promote journalism conducted by international and Georgian non-governmental organisations, since this gives people a chance to perfect and develop their journalistic and technical skills.

## **Media and Government**

Relations between the media and the authorities in Guria can neither be said to be wholly antagonistic, nor wholly cooperative. In its relations with the authorities, the media is guided by its own interests and the principle of public demand. The basic goal in its relationship with the local authorities is to obtain the information it requires, which sometimes brings about cooperation, but more often results in conflict situations. In this respect, there is no noticeable change since the Revolution.

The authorities are particularly hostile to media interest in issues such as:

- Monitoring revenues received from the service infrastructure of the Supsa terminal;
- Ensuring transparent media coverage of privatisation initiatives in the Ureki and Grigoleti recreation zones;
- Monitoring the implementation of social programmes;
- The administration and use of central government grants for agricultural purposes;
- The timber business and related illegal bargains between businessmen and the local authorities.

Although the local authorities display no particular enthusiasm towards cooperation with the regional media, and indeed sometimes even try to put it under pressure, they have often been forced to act in accordance with the norms regarding public information stipulated in the Administrative Code by media organisations acting in coordination with local non-governmental organisations. There have been cases when media organisations or civil society representatives resorted to the courts and made the authorities adhere to the law. Regional and district administrations, as a rule, avoid conflicts with the media. However, some cases of threats or verbal or physical abuse against representatives of the media are still reported. Yet such episodes do not alter the general picture of the relationship between the authorities and the media.

## **Media and Society**

Public demand for accessible information and alternative, non-state sources of information have played a serious role in the formation of the region's independent media. The emergence of a media space that adequately reflects public demand has strengthened the relationship between media organisations and their customers. The best illustration of this is their high circulation, which secures the Gurian media first place amongst regional representatives of the Georgian media. The circulation of independent newspapers in Guria ranges from 1500 to 4500 on average; some of them are published three times a week. It is important to note that the majority of these copies are distributed to subscribers. The volume and frequent periodicity of the print media, and the active involvement shown by subscribers, are clear indicators that there is strong public interest and an increased demand for the existence of an independent media.

Readers trust information spread by the local media, which often leads to civil activity. For instance, serious alarm and protest was caused amongst the public by a series of articles in the newspaper *Ho da Ara* (Yes and No) dealing with the criminal situation in Lanchkhuti. The articles exposed links between local criminals, the local authorities, and employees of the regional division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. As a result of this, a clean-up of local government structures began and a number of criminals were arrested.

Society itself has played a major role in establishing an independent media, particularly the print media, in Guria, particularly that part which is concentrated in its civil sector. As noted above, the emergence of some newspapers in the region was closely related to the activities of the local non-governmental sector. Most local non-governmental organisations printed their own bulletins and newsletters and are still doing so. As a rule, people skilled in these activities in the non-governmental sector act as resources for the independent media; sometimes a small unit of civil society can become a media organisation. This was the case with the only independent paper in Ozurgeti, *Ozurgetis Moambe* (the Ozurgeti Messenger), which is a continuation of the *Ozurgeti Press Club*.

## **Lanchkhuti**

### **Newspaper *Ho da Ara* (Yes and No)**

The newspaper *Ho da Ara* was established in 1999. It was independent from the outset, belonging to a private entity, and was registered as a limited company.

*Ho da Ara* did not have to forge an alliance with the local authorities in order to cope with financial difficulties. In the very first year of its existence, the editorial staff managed to fully sell out all copies and ensure its gradual growth and stable periodicity. Initially, the newspaper *Ho da Ara* had a circulation of 1000; today its circulation has reached 3500. The range of its readers has also improved in proportion to its circulation; in addition to the town of Lanchkhuti, the paper is now distributed to all villages in the Lanchkhuti district. It is remarkable that throughout the whole period of impressive growth it did not receive grants from any international donor organisation; only later did it receive an IREX grant to establish itself on the Internet.

The newspaper's success depends on its thoroughly thought-out editorial policy and proper management. From the very beginning, the paper's editorial staff had developed a strategy to link the number of subscribers to the scale of circulation. The first few issues were distributed to potential readers free of charge under a conditional and voluntary agreement stipulating that they would subscribe to the newspaper providing they found it interesting. The editorial staff surveyed their readers' opinion about the articles they had published and determined which topics they found interesting. Subsequent issues were then prepared on the basis of the survey's outcomes. Such an approach proved fruitful: *Ho da Ara* is one of the most well-recognised newspapers in the Lanchkhuti district and has 3500 subscribers, equal to its circulation. Likewise, it has an efficient distribution network, ensuring that new issues are supplied to its readers in a timely fashion.

In terms of content, the newspaper is rich in topics and is intended for people from various age and interest groups. The editorial staff of the newspaper place major emphasis on covering current events in the Lanchkhuti district, reporting considerably less on news from across the country. Among the issues that are of particular interest are: the work of the local government, the staffing policy of the district authorities (especially with regards to corruption), and the social and economic situation in the district. It is full of criticism, something that always provoked the authorities' annoyance, both before and after the Revolution. However, this seldom leads to pressure on editorial staff or the proprietor of the newspaper, and even if such instances have still been reported, they have been expressed mostly as threats made during telephone calls or private conversations.

Besides politics, *Ho da Ara* has so-called fun pages, for example a "married couple's club", which alongside articles and texts prepared by the editorial staff contain letters with funny stories and anecdotes received from readers. The newspaper also has a religious column, with articles about Orthodox holidays and holy places, along with a question and answer column, in which an Orthodox priest answers questions from readers. The newspaper has never published any articles about holidays associated with other confessions (Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists) or scenes depicting their religious life or social situation.

Readers' interest in *Ho da Ara* derives not only from the news and entertainment material it prints, but also from the fact that it publishes announcements dealing with property buying and selling, renting and mort-

gaging. Such information is in great demand and is financially profitable for the newspaper.

The paper's technical facilities include three computers acquired with personal savings, one printer, one scanner, two voice-recorders and one digital photo-camera.

Typing and paginating of the newspaper takes place locally in Lanchkhuti. It is printed in Tbilisi on A3 format paper and is a four-page publication issued three times a week. The price per issue is 10 tetri. Though it is printed in Tbilisi, there have been no recorded problems with distribution or periodicity. Most of the print run goes straight to subscribers, with only a small part going to sale.

The newspaper has nine employees on its roster: an editor, who simultaneously performs the duties of manager, an assistant editor, an executive secretary, an accountant, three journalists and two technicians.

### **Newspaper *Lanchkhuti Plus***

This newspaper was established in 1995; it is owned by a single person and is registered as a limited company.

*Lanchkhuti Plus* managed to attract readers' attention right from the start, and has earned its own place in Guria's regional media. It has been steadily and rapidly increasing its capacity and now has stable periodicity and circulation. Initially, *Lanchkhuti Plus* had a circulation of 1000, however today this figure has risen to 1500 copies per issue. The number of pages has also increased from four to six, and it is published more regularly – it used to be weekly, and is now published twice a week.

The paper focuses on the work of the local authorities. In so doing, it does not simply concentrate on a given problem, but tries to monitor different areas of government activity. Financial support received from the Open Society – Georgia Foundation and the Eurasia Foundation helped the newspaper to define its working style. One grant was directed towards ensuring that the work of the local assembly of elected officials was transparent, while the other essentially aimed to report cases of corruption. It is significant that even after the Revolution the newspaper followed the course it had earlier defined. In this respect, *Lanchkhuti Plus* has published articles containing information about pension rolls and frozen salaries which resulted in serious public unrest, with people rising up against the government to protect their rights.



As well as reporting what the local authorities are doing, *Lanchkhuti Plus* also has a wide range of articles on the economic and social situation in the district and in the Guria region in general. In order to obtain information, the newspaper cooperates with the local authorities; in addition, it also manages to get analytical material from Tbilisi. Among its most cutting articles are those dealing with the illegal timber business and environmental problems.

The newspaper is trying to expand its audience and therefore extends its reporting beyond strictly economic or political issues. It includes the following pages: man and society, law and human rights, culture, sport and entertainment. One of the editorial staff's concerns is to also make the newspaper appealing to people who have moved away from the district but are nevertheless interested in the life of their native region. With this purpose in mind, the newspaper is also distributed in Tbilisi, Poti and Batumi. The editors plan to boost its readership within this category.

Readers are particularly interested in the section called 'Restricted Area'. It contains material and reports from court hearings, from prisons, and various crime-related stories. According to the paper's editor, they have largely guaranteed stable circulation since this section was introduced.

*Lanchkhuti Plus* has an information exchange agreement with the news agency *Prime News*. Accordingly, several of the paper's columns are taken up by events from across the country. For its part, *Lanchkhuti Plus* informs *Prime News* about current events taking place in Guria.

The paper's editorial staff have built up an efficient distribution network; *Lanchkhuti Plus* is timely distributed to all villages in the Lanchkhuti district, as well as other cities and towns in Georgia.

Typing and pagination of the newspaper take place in Lanchkhuti; it is printed in Tbilisi. *Lanchkhuti Plus* is an A3 format, six-page newspaper and is published twice a week. It has no subscribers, but it has a significant number of permanent readers, which allows the paper to be sure that most of the 1500 copies it prints will be sold out.

*Lanchkhuti Plus*'s technical facilities were acquired thanks to grants from the Open Society – Georgia Foundation and the Eurasia Foundation, including: three computers of different generations and capacities, two printers, one scanner, one voice-recorder and one digital photo-camera.

*Lanchkhuti Plus* has 10 employees: editor-in-chief, four editors, issue editor, technical assistant to the editor-in-chief, and three reporters.

### **Newspaper *Lanchkhutis Moambe* (Lanchkhuti Messenger)**

This newspaper was founded in 1933, and like other regional newspapers, it used to be the publishing body of the Lanchkhuti district council and the District Executive Committee of the Communist Party. Initially, the paper was called *Damkvreli Kolmeurne* (Leading Farmer), though later its name was changed to *Mshromeli Kolmeurne* (Industrious Farmer). It has been called *Lanchkhutis Moambe* since 1991. Until 2002 it was state owned. The newspaper is currently registered as a limited company.

The newspaper is funded by the local government and is, essentially, focused on covering its activities. However, government funding is very sparse. And in fact, there is very little demand for the paper. As a result, the newspaper is not published regularly, except during election campaigns, when political life in the region and district reaches its height.

Typing and pagination take place in Lanchkhuti, while printing is carried out in Tbilisi. *Lanchkhutis Moambe* is an A3 format, four-page publication issued twice a week. Its circulation varies between 500 and 1000 copies. The newspaper has no technical facilities of its own. It has eight employees on its roster: editor, assistant editor, a typist, three journalists, a driver and a technician.

### **Newspaper *Natlismtsemeli* (the Baptist)**

This newspaper was established in 1998 as a publishing body of the Lanchkhuti religious school on the initiative of the priest of the church of Virgin Mary and the director of the school, high priest Svimeon.

Articles in the paper do not contain political or economic information; they deal only with issues of Orthodox spirituality. According to the high priest Svimeon himself, the newspaper's goal is the spiritual education of its flock. The newspaper publishes excerpts from different religious books, sermons of the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church of Georgia, and father Svimeon's own articles. The newspaper does not contain articles about different faiths or other Christian confessions.

Typing and pagination are done on a computer belonging to the Lanchkhuti religious school, after which the newspaper is sent to Tbilisi for printing. It is in A3 format, takes up four pages and is issued monthly; it has a circulation of 2,000; the retail price per print is 10 tetri.

All preparatory activities regarding the publication are carried out by a single person, high priest Svemion himself.

## ***Bulletin of the Information Centre of the local Government in Lanchkhuti – Transparent Self-Government***

The Information Centre in Lanchkhuti was established in 2003. Prior to that, the Centre functioned under the auspices of the Association of Sakrebulo. In 2003, it was established as part of a network of analogous centres in different towns (Telavi, Signagi, Lagodekhi, Rustavi, Gori, Kutaisi, Zestafoni, Lanchkhuti, Ambrolauri) with financial support from the Swiss Agency for Development and the Eurasia Foundation. The Centre serves the purpose of making public information accessible to citizens.

The Information Centre has the following functions:

- Obtaining, analysing and disseminating public information to the readers;
- Holding public meetings with target groups (representatives of local government and citizens); eliciting urgent problems, working out and passing recommendations on to the government and monitoring their implementation.

The implemented activities, carried out in accordance with the points listed above, are summarised in the bulletin, which analyses current events taking place in the district and publishes decisions and bylaws passed by the Gamgeoba and the Sakrebulo, as well as laws adopted by the Georgian Parliament.

It is not only the general public that reads the bulletin; it is also circulated among non-governmental organisations and local government agencies.

*Transparent Self-Government* is issued monthly, printed on A4 format paper and takes up 12 pages. It has a circulation of 2,000 copies and is distributed free of charge.

## **Ozurgeti**

### ***Newspaper Ozurgetis Moambe (Ozurgeti Messenger)***

This newspaper was established in 2002. Initially, it was a news bulletin from the non-governmental organisation, Ozurgeti Presclub, and used to come out once or twice a week. It started printing more regularly in 2004 when the newspaper received a grant from the Open Society – Georgia Foundation. Indeed, it may be stated that only after it won this competition was it possible to establish the newspaper at all.

*Ozurgetis Moambe* focuses on the political and economic situation in the district. Its publications stand out for their balanced attitude and strict civic position. The line which the newspaper has developed draws on the path which it had pursued in the early stages of its development, when the people in charge of it, who were then representatives of the *Ozurgeti Press Club*, were actively involved in monitoring local developments and were trying their best to promote transparency in the work of local authorities and to facilitate attempts to stamp out corruption. Both at that time and afterwards, when the *Ozurgeti Press Club* news bulletin became *Ozurgetis Moambe*, its leaders came under pressure from local political and business groups. This pressure was expressed not only through verbal harassment and insults – the founder and editor of the newspaper, Vladimir Menabde, was also physically wounded. To some extent this even helped the paper, as it allowed it to formulate a clear position regarding life in the district and boosted its image in the eyes of the local population. The organisation started to actively seek allies and establish contacts with influential Tbilisi-based organisations such as the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association and the Liberty Institute. It also joined the Tbilisi media network; it has been cooperating with the newspapers *Khvalindeli Dghe* (The Tomorrow) and *Akhali Versia* (The New Version), and also as the TV company *Rustavi 2*, together with which it prepared several editions of the programme '60 Minutes'; the news agency *Prime News* was also among its partners. Its professionalism has benefited greatly from its staff's participation in seminars aimed at promoting investigative journalism organised by the IREX Foundation.

The local authorities used traditional means to put pressure on the paper, from creating problems in its relationship with the local publishing house through to warning local entrepreneurs not to place their advertisements in the paper. Problems related to the publishing house were solved thanks to the newspaper's bosses' connections in Tbilisi, where it is now printed. The difficulties with advertisements turned out to be temporary and have now disappeared.

As well as the methods listed above, Sakpress's (the Georgian Press) local distribution network was also used against the newspaper. Issues of the newspaper that had been given to Sakpress for onward distribution were returned almost in full to the editorial office, supposedly because of a lack of demand for the newspaper. When individual distributors started to disseminate it, however, it turned out that society showed a marked interest in the newspaper and it easily sold out.

Typing and pagination of the *Ozurgetis Moambe* take place in Ozurgeti, and it is printed in Tbilisi. It is an A3 format, eight-page weekly publication, and has a circulation of 1000; the price per issue is 20 tetri and it is distributed in the Ozurgeti district.

The paper's technical facilities include two computers, a printer, a scanner, a digital photo camera, two voice-recorders and one diesel generator.

*Ozurgetis Moambe* has 15 employees: an editor, three editors in service, a technician, a photographer, and nine reporters.

### **Newspaper *Alioni* (Dawn)**

This newspaper was established in 1931. In the past, it was the publishing body of the Communist Party Ozurgeti (Makharadze) District Executive Committee and District Council. It was initially called *Leninis Droshta* (Lenin's Banner), but in the early 1990s it was renamed *Alioni* (Dawn). For a long time, the paper was not published at all due to the financial crisis. Since 2001, it has been coming out on a relatively stable basis.

The newspaper is registered as a limited company and its founders are the paper's staff jointly with the Ozurgeti district administration. The administration allots up to 5000 lari annually to subsidise the paper. This sum is spent on preparatory and printing activities; salaries depend on revenues the paper receives from sales. As a rule, most *Alioni* subscribers are local government bodies, who have been persuaded to subscribe by the administration.

The paper's reporting focuses entirely on the work of the local authorities. It publishes bylaws and decrees of the district Gamgeoba and Sakrebulo, as well as interviews with local government representatives, and stories about well-known people from the district. It is not noted for its variety of content or critical style.

Typing, pagination, and printing take place in Ozurgeti at a local publishing house. *Alioni* is printed on A3 format paper, takes up four pages and is issued weekly (though periodicity is often disrupted). It has a circulation of 1000, of which 600 go to subscribers and the rest is sold for 20 tetri a copy.

The paper's technical facilities include one computer, one digital photo camera and one voice recorder.

*Alioni* has nine employees, six of which are full-time and three of which are on a contractual basis. The staff include: an editor, an assistant editor, three journalists, a technician, a photographer, an accountant and an office cleaner.

## TV company *Guria*

The TV company *Guria* was established in 1991. It has been private since the very beginning. It is registered as a limited company, with all 100% of its shares belonging to one of its founders.

The company has a cooperation agreement with *Rustavi 2*, a Tbilisi-based TV company, to relay its programmes. Thanks to this agreement, *Guria* can fill its airtime. The company transmits its own programmes daily from 07:30 to 12:20 and from 18:00 to 01:00. Within this time frame, the news show 'Fact' is on air three times a week, sometimes even more often, depending on how dynamic public life in the district is. Programmes include: a series designed for children; monthly talk shows and debates; and a weekly religious programme 'Ambioni'. Music videos and Georgian films are also transmitted, and some of its airtime is allocated to advertisements, congratulations and obituaries.

The TV company actively cooperates with the local non-governmental sector, particularly on issues regarding environmental protection. Among the numerous joint analytical programmes prepared in cooperation with non-governmental organisations are those dealing with illegal felling, the negative impact of explosives located on the territory of the former Soviet Army stockpile in the village of Meria, the Askani and Supsa terminals, and many others.

The relationship with the local government was rather tense in the period preceding the Rose Revolution. The reason was that the company was transmitting programmes made by *Rustavi 2*. Since the Revolution, relations have normalised and cooperation prevails. The company focuses on reporting the work of the district Gamgeoba and Sakrebulo, transmits working meetings and holds discussions or running commentaries.

*Guria's* revenue is insufficient and is supplemented mainly by advertisements and private announcements. However, local businessmen avoid placing advertisements on television for fear of tax service officials and criminals. The company's revenues increase in election periods, when political life in the district reaches its height and political parties advertise their campaigns on TV.

The company's financial stability is supported by its participation in programmes run by international organisations and grants received from donors. The company cooperates actively with Internews and IREX. Between 1999 and 2002 *Guria* received several grants from the *Eurasia*

*Foundation* aimed at upgrading its equipment and capacity building. The company has also received several grants from *IREX* to organise live debates and talk shows. In total, *Guria* has organised 11 talk shows and 33 debates in this period.

The company has its own building and technical facilities, which include: a private mast, a transmitter, several studios well equipped for live transmissions, an assembly table, video recorders, monitors, VHS and digital cameras. The company broadcasts across almost the whole of the Ozurgeti district, and parts of the Lanchkhuti, Chokhatauri and Kobuleti districts.

Guria has 33 employees.

### **TV Company *Madi***

*Madi* was established in 2002; it is a limited company and is owned by two founders who hold 50% shares each. It was created with financial support from a Moscow businessman who is a native of Ozurgeti, the proprietor of the TV Company *Moskva – otkryti mir* (Moscow – the Open World).

From the outset, the company has had commercial goals; its development strategy was to create an organisation akin to the cable TV company *Aieti*. However, in contrast to *Aieti*, which provides its services by cable, *Madi* has purchased an expensive, multi-channel code system and introduced a more up-to-date level of service that is sophisticated not only for the Guria region but for Georgia as a whole.

Today *Madi* has over 3000 customers and can maintain itself with the money coming from this source. It relays 25 channels and uses one of them to transmit its own programmes, which take up seven hours of its overall airtime. The air network includes the following: a news programme, *Objective*; a creative programme, ‘Arpha’ (Harp), a youth programme, ‘X-file’; analytical programme ‘Review’; a humorous programme, ‘Khokhmebi’ (Histrionics); and a folklore and ethnographical programme, ‘Kartuli Simgera’ (Georgian Song).

*Madi* journalists travel all around the Ozurgeti, Lanchkhuti, Chokhatauri, Kobuleti and Poti districts searching for news. The ‘X-file’ team raises problems which affect local youths: unemployment, drug addiction, trafficking, and migration. *Madi*’s musical commentator prepares items for ‘Georgian Song’ in Guria’s villages, writes down unknown tunes and interviews celebrated performers of Gurian songs.

*Madi* is a member of the Georgian TV Broadcasters Association. This enables it to involve its journalists and technical personnel in different activities held under the aegis of this organisation which are aimed at improving their professional skills.

*Madi's* technical capacity is up-to-date; it has a coded system of signal transmission, digital assembly equipment, monitors, an audio mixer, and digital cameras.

## **Chokhatauri**

### **Newspaper *Guria News***

This newspaper is the heir of *Brdzolis Drosha* (The Banner of Struggle), which was established by the Executive Committee of the Communist Party in 1933. Its name was later changed to *Komunizmis Gantiadi* (the Dawn of Communism). In 1991, it was published as *Chokhatauri*, and subsequently as *Chokhatauri Matsne* (Chokhatauri Messenger).

*Chokhatauri Matsne* was registered as a limited company and became private. Its founders decided to turn it into a regional newspaper. To this end, a project was submitted to the Embassy of the United States of America, which endorsed the project. Since then, the newspaper issued by *Chokhatauri Matsne* has been called *Guria News*.

The newspaper focuses mostly on local news. It traditionally has the following sections: news, a talk show, economy, culture and sport, and an entertainment page.

*Guria News* has a normal relationship with the local authorities, although in the period preceding the Rose Revolution relations between the editor and the government became so tense that criminal proceedings were initiated against him. Since the Revolution, relations have improved. However, obtaining public information on certain issues, especially related to timber and social programmes, has become even more difficult than it was before the Revolution.

*Guria News* has been published regularly right from the start and has never had any failures. It focuses mostly on current regional news, and for this it has a technically well-equipped, mobile and efficient network of reporters all across Guria. It also has offices in all three central districts of Guria. Beyond doubt, *Chokhatauri Messenger* would not have been able to build this system using only its own resources; international donor



organisations helped it to carry out this mission. In addition to the US Embassy grant, the goal of which was to enhance the newspaper's distribution area, *Guria News* has received an IREX grant aimed at developing Internet communication. It has received two other mini-grants from IREX to ensure coverage of the pre-election and election campaigns, a grant from the Eurasia Foundation for the development of advertising and management, and another IREX grant designed to help the paper enhance its periodicity.

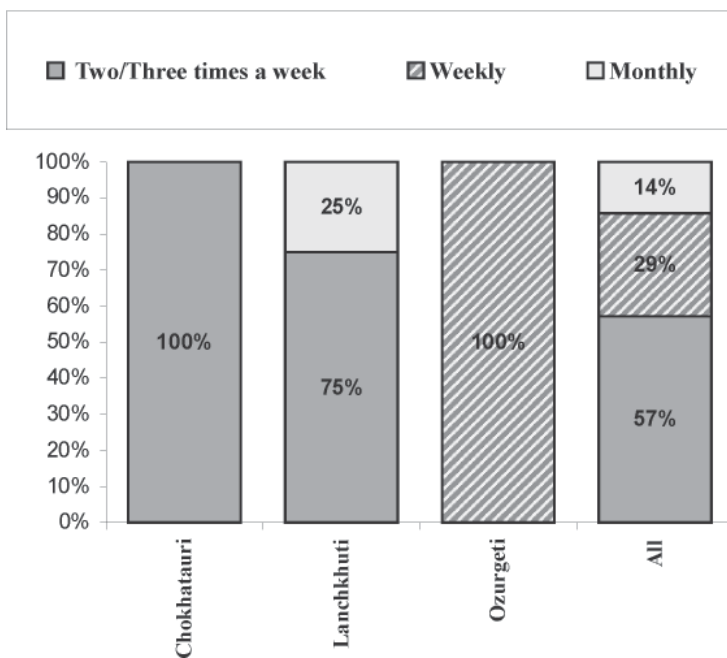
Subscription fees are the paper's major source of revenue. The monthly subscription cost is 2 lari. According to its managerial staff, *Guria News* already has over 4000 subscribers. Another source of income is private announcements, obituaries and congratulation messages.

Until 2004, *Guria News* was a weekly paper, but financial support from IREX made it possible to begin publication twice a week. The newspaper goes on sale on Mondays and Thursdays. The Monday issue has 16 pages, four of which are in colour. The Thursday issue has eight pages, all black and white. The price for a 16-page issue is 25 tetri, whereas the eight-page issue costs 15 tetri. The Monday issue is accompanied by a four-page addendum, *For Children under Twenty-One*, prepared by children from Chokhatauri. Typing and pagination of the newspaper take place locally; printing is carried out in Tbilisi. *Guria News* is A3 format and is disseminated in the districts of Chokhatauri, Lanchkhuti, and Ozurgeti with a circulation of 4,500 copies.

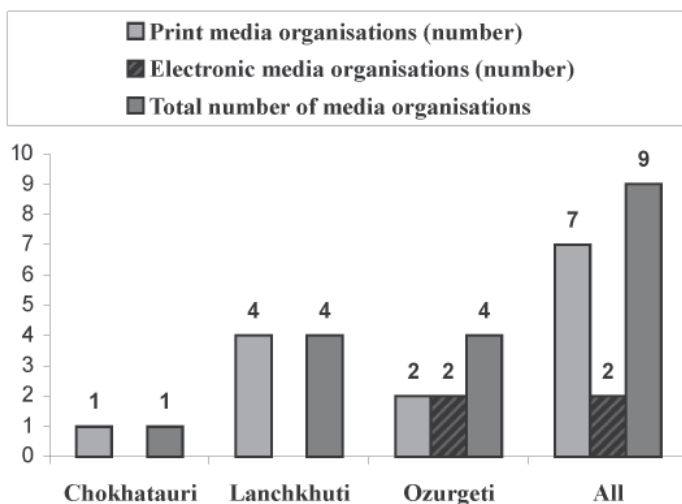
*Guria News'* facilities include: six computers in the central office in Chokhatauri, two computers in Ozurgeti and one computer in the Lanchkhuti office, three digital photo cameras, three format printers, a photocopier, a scanner; and a satellite dish to connect to the Internet.

Twenty people are involved in preparing the newspaper. Its permanent staff includes: editor-in-chief, three heads of the district offices and their three secretaries, a technical director, a photographer and an accountant. The newspaper has 10 contracted journalists.

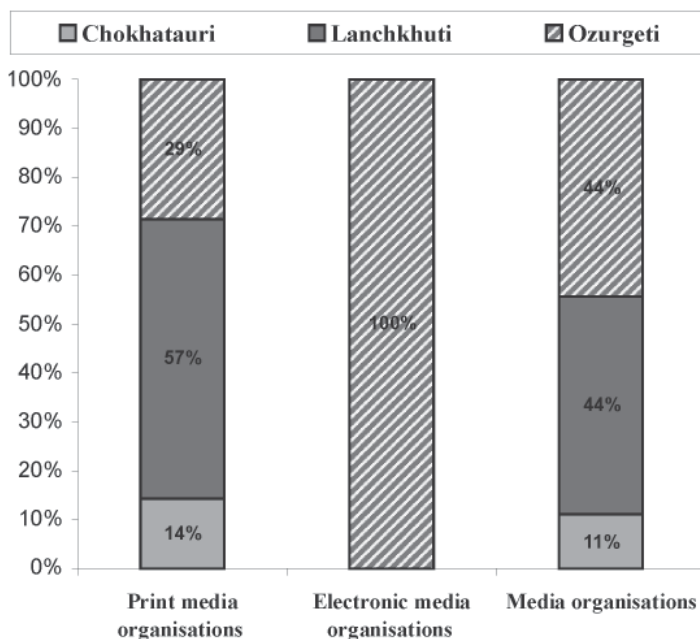
### Publication intervals of print media organisations in Guria by district



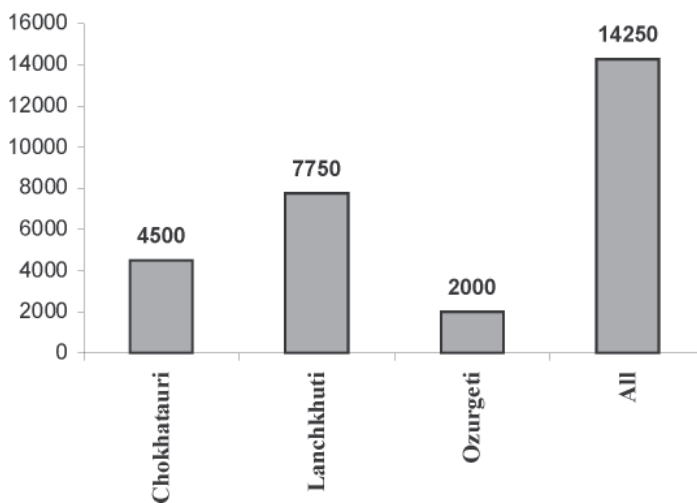
### Number of media organisations in Guria by district



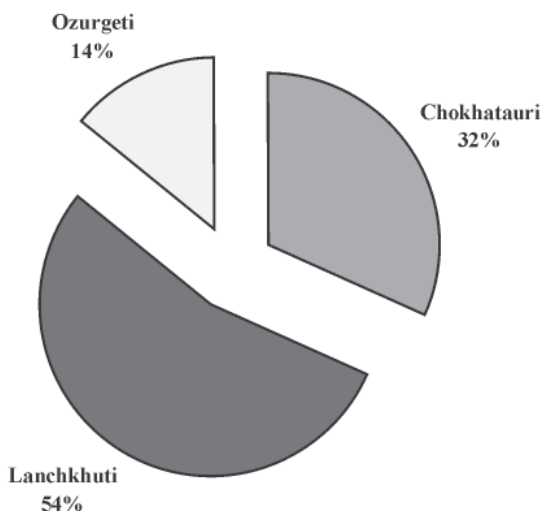
### Percentage distribution of media organisations in Guria by district



**Overall circulation of print media  
in Guria by district**



**Pie chart showing overall circulation of print media  
in Guria by district**



## AJARA<sup>1</sup>

Ajara covers 4,1 % of Georgian territory, and its population makes up 8.6%<sup>2</sup> of the overall population of the country; 93.3% of the population of Ajara is Georgian; the other 6.7% is made up of Russians, Armenians, Abkhaz and others. Macroeconomic achievements, with regards to the overall domestic product index of 0.54, win it second place among the eleven regions of Georgia.

### **The Specific Features of the Region and their Impact on Media Development**

Like Kakheti and Kvemo Kartli, Ajara is another example of how clan regimes were created in the regions with the greatest economic potential. At the same time, in many respects Ajara is unlike other regions of Georgia. In contrast to Kvemo Kartli, it lacks useful mineral resources, and unlike Kakheti, it does not have a strong agricultural infrastructure tied to the Russian market. What it does have, however, is:

- One of the largest ports on the Black Sea coast, which yields transporting and oil-refining infrastructure;
- Borders with Turkey, a NATO member country, which is also a major economic partner in the Caucasus and Central Asia. The Sarpi border post, which is in Ajara, enabled the local regime to maintain control over freight traffic and control its incomes;
- Tourist infrastructure: following the conflict in Abkhazia, Ajara became virtually the only area in Georgia where Georgian citizens could visit health resorts, and tourism was a considerable source of income for the Abashidze regime;
- Autonomous Republic status, which meant that unlike other regional clan regimes, Aslan Abashidze's regime was to a certain degree untouchable and could act with impunity;
- The Russian military base, which in the past was effectively used as a bargaining chip when managing relations with the central government in Tbilisi.

The convergence of these political and economic factors rendered the regime of Aslan Abashidze, beyond any doubt, the most authoritarian in

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<sup>1</sup> This study of Ajara region was held on 1-6 September, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Outcomes of the 2002 census // State Department of Statistics. Tbilisi 2002

Georgia, and this in turn predetermined the status of the media in the region to a great extent. Throughout Abashidze's reign, the local authorities could not accept the possibility that alternative points of view existed: they supported the creation of a loyal media and suppressed the independent media in every possible way. Undeniably, Aslan Abashidze's regime was one of the most important factors stimulating the development of the regional media in Ajara. In addition to this specific feature, which primarily affected the degree of media independence, there are other factors which give rise to technical problems, e.g.:

- The specific geographic characteristics of the region, i.e. mountainous terrain, which hinders the dissemination of both electronic and print media (under Abashidze's rule, the TV company *Ajara* switched to satellite broadcasting to ensure that information reaching people in highland areas would be pro-government);
- Low purchasing capacity in the region, a challenge to enhancing the independence of print media;
- The attitudes of the Government towards the media in the post-Revolution period, when the old, Abashidze-era patronage system over mass communications was no longer adequate to the new conditions and the Government partially disclaimed liabilities in regard to media that had been loyal to Abashidze, as a consequence of which certain means of information simply disappeared.

Another peculiarity of Ajara rests in the confessional diversity of its population. Muslims and Orthodox Christians live side by side with one another. However, this does not affect the functioning of the media. The local media in the highlands of Ajara, where the Muslim Georgian population traditionally makes up a majority, did not bring religious themes to the fore even when attempts were made to play the faith card in the conflict between the central and the regional governments.

A major factor impacting on the development of the media in Ajara is of course the capacity of civil society and the problems it faces. Under the Abashidze regime it was pressure exerted by civil society over the authorities that made the existence of the independent media possible. It should be borne in mind, however, that non-governmental organisations themselves were under pressure. Therefore influence over the Abashidze regime could come only from Tbilisi-based international organisations. Today the non-governmental sector is fighting fit. Quite often the inde-

pendent media comes up with new civil initiatives and measures, especially when it comes to the abuse of power and violation of the principle of public accountability on the part of local government representatives. Cooperation and joint activities between the media and the non-governmental sector have become a serious mechanism for safeguarding journalistic morals and freedom of speech. A shining example of this was the strike organized by journalists of the TV company *Ajara* in winter 2005. The leadership of *Ajara* was compelled to allow the TV company to pursue an independent news policy.

### **Differences within the Region by Town**

The leading city in *Ajara* with respect to the number of media organisations is its capital, Batumi. In the period preceding September 2004, it had 10 acting media organisations, four of which have ceased business because of financial difficulties. Other towns and administrative centres have one media organisation each, owned, typically, by the government. For a while, Kobuleti was an exception. Alongside the government newspaper, an independent paper was also being published with financial support from the Open Society – Georgia Foundation. Unfortunately, after this grant expired, the newspaper could no longer function on its own.

As noted above, there are six media organisations functioning in Batumi: four printed and two electronic. Two of the four print media organisations are independent, while the other two belong to the State; of the two electronic media organizations, one represents the government of *Ajara*, while the other was returned to its founder and legitimate owner after the Revolution.

The disproportionate development of the media in *Ajara* is the result of Aslan Abashidze's thirteen years of rule, since he used administrative resources against freedom of speech and barred civil society and public groups from creating alternative information sources within the Autonomous Republic.

### **Print Media**

Of the 11 media organisations in *Ajara*, nine deal with print media. This is a significant figure; nevertheless there are many barriers in the way of the development of print media in *Ajara*:

- Newspapers founded after the Revolution encounter difficulties in establishing themselves in the media market alongside existing newspapers recognized as independent, which did not tolerate the Abashidze regime and dared to publish bold articles, thus gaining popularity among the public (there are two such publications in Ajara);
- In spite of growing interest towards the independent media, the biggest part of the population (predominantly in the highlands) has no opportunity to subscribe;
- A hindrance to increased newspaper circulation is the inefficiency of the distribution network (Sakpressa (Georgian Press), the post service)<sup>3</sup>, caused in its turn by the difficult terrain of the region;
- The majority of newspapers published in Ajara are owned and financed by the State. Subsequently, their management is not market-oriented. For these newspapers, it is extremely difficult to establish themselves in the market; therefore in most cases the intervention of the regional administration is necessary to ensure their distribution;
- Independent editions face acute financial problems; revenue received from sales is not sufficient for newspapers to function effectively. The advertising market, on the other hand, is mostly insubstantial.

We have already noted above that Ajara has nine print media organisations; only two of these are independent (both are Batumi-based newspapers). Even these two editions would have been hard to maintain had moral and legal (and also financial) support not been provided by international organisations. Unfortunately, the assistance rendered by international organisations for the development of an independent media did not always lead to the desired effect, and once the grant expired, these publications would often face crises. This was exactly what happened to the newspaper *Akhali Kobuleti* (new Kobuleti), founded in the town of Kobuleti by the newspaper *Ajara PS* with the support of the Open Society – Georgia Foundation. When the grant expired, *Akhali Kobuleti* shut down.

State-owned periodicals had been lavishly financed by the authorities in Abashidze's time, enabling editing houses to publish newspapers with stable circulation and regular editions. Robust funding guaranteed not only stability of circulation and regular editions but also fostered growth, especially for newspapers coming out in Batumi. Unfortunately, with this

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<sup>3</sup> After the Revolution, the threat caused by restrictions imposed by the authorities diminished, and the Newspaper *Batumelebi* started building a distribution network in the highlands of Ajara using its own resources.



guaranteed income the publishing houses did little to adapt their newspapers to market conditions; they made few attempts to improve the content in order to make it more appealing to readers at large. Their characteristic old Soviet style and, subsequently, low sale indicators, are the direct results of this.<sup>4</sup>

Since the Revolution, media conditions have changed in Batumi. Some newspapers which were supported by the Abashidze clan have closed down; other new newspapers have appeared. Since the Revolution only three new newspapers have been founded. Unfortunately, due to financial difficulties these new newspapers encounter difficulties in getting established on the regional media market. Two of the three aforementioned newspapers (*Ajara 24 Hours* and *Batumuri Versia*) are Batumi branches of the leading newspapers in Tbilisi: *24 Hours* and *Akhali Versia*, while the third, *Batumi Voice*, is a publication of the Good Will Mission of Ajara – a union which was persecuted for many years under the Abashidze regime.

## Electronic Media

There are only two electronic media organisations functioning in Ajara. One of these, the TV company *Channel 25*, is independent, while the other, TV and Radio Company *Ajara*, is a department subordinate to the TV and Radio Broadcasting of the Council of Ministers of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara. Both are based in Batumi.

The TV company *Channel 25* is a limited company. Though it acquired legal status in 2000, it was nonetheless a target of attacks by government structures during Abashidze's rule. The process ended with a change in owner, and 51% of the TV company was passed on to be managed by an officer of Ajara Security Service, in violation of the law. After this the TV company stopped broadcasting news programmes. The original founder was restored as rightful owner after the 2004 Batumi Revolution.

The TV company *Ajara* has been under state ownership since its foundation, i.e. since 1987, and previously functioned under the status of the TV and Radio Committee of the Council of Ministers of the Autonomous

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<sup>4</sup> Statistics regarding subscriptions before the Revolution showed absolutely different results, but it must be kept in mind that the local authorities not only financed these publications, but also paid their subscriptions. In this regard, Ajara resembles other regions of Georgia in which regional administrations to this day require employees of state-funded organizations to subscribe to the government newspaper.

Republic. It remains under state ownership today, but now has a different status and carries out both TV and radio broadcasting.

The situation in the Ajarian electronic media differs from that of other regional Georgian electronic media organizations in almost all respects. In terms of technical equipment and capabilities, it has much greater potential than other Georgian regional TV and Radio companies. In this respect the electronic media in Ajara can compete even with the leading channels from Tbilisi. It was for this reason that the *First Channel* of the State Television had claims regarding the property of the TV and Radio Company *Ajara*. Although measures were taken by the authorities to protect *Ajara's* property, part of it was nevertheless lost, although this did not prevent the company from continuing work. In spite of this loss, the company remains one of the leading media organisations in the country broadcasting across the whole of Georgia.

In terms of its technical capabilities, the TV company *Channel 25* also belongs on the list of leading electronic media in Georgia. By a twist of fate, the company had originally been able to improve its technical capacities with funding from Aslan Abashidze's regime, at the expense of restricting its own independence. After the Batumi Revolution in May 2004, when the former proprietor regained ownership rights over the company, he took over a television channel that was technically much improved.

## **Media and Government**

The Batumi Revolution in May 2004 put an end to thirteen years of authoritarian rule by Aslan Abashidze's clan in the Autonomous Republic of Ajara. Throughout this period, the development of the media was completely determined by the nature and the style of Abashidze's rule. The Ajarian leader personally read articles published in the local media about what was happening both in the region and in the country as a whole, and he had close relationships with media representatives loyal to the regime (especially television, which covers the whole of Georgia) this included:

- Supplying information about current affairs;
- Approving the list of issues to be discussed with media representatives and receiving advance warning about possible questions he would be asked;
- The work of the regional media was coordinated by the Press Service of the Supreme Council of Ajara, therefore these mass communica-

tions were characterized by uniformity of substance and unanimity of position;

- Along with planning the policy lines media organisations should take, the Press Service of the Supreme Council also defined their staff policies.

Abashidze's regime resorted to violence and moral pressure against the independent media, which was manifest in:

- Blackmailing with the threat of punishing family members and relations;
- Physical attacks and threats of personal retribution;
- Raids on offices and destroying equipment;
- Pressure on owners to sell or give away their shares;
- Pressure on the local publishing house to refuse its services to independent newspapers. This was the reason why newspapers were printed in Tbilisi. Even then, however, the authorities tried to prevent newspapers from entering Ajara: they had to be inspected at the Cholokhi checkpoint;
- Refusing interviews and denying public information to representatives of undesired media organisations.

After the Revolution the situation changed sharply. However, problems regarding the relationship between the local authorities and the independent media still persist. Major problems remain concerning transparency of the work of state agencies and the accessibility of public information. According to local experts, after removing the limitations imposed by Abashidze's regime, the independent media endeavours to introduce journalistic inquiry into its practice, but still meets with aggression on the part of the authorities. Although it responds in a similar way, the post-Revolutionary government of Ajara cannot successfully employ Abashidze's methods in its relationship with the media. The demands for democracy, openness and transparency have penetrated into the TV company *Ajara*, formerly founded as a state structure. In the first half of 2005, the company's employees organised a strike, exerting some pressure over the company's news division. The strike was then supported by the local independent media and non-governmental organisations. The Government dismissed the old management and appointed a new one. It is worthy of note that coalition actions by public and non-governmental organisations against attempts to restore the old style of management have been quite successful.

## Media and Society

Abashidze's regime endeavoured to monopolise information in the region. In the period preceding the Revolution, they even managed to impose restrictions on the dissemination of the centralised press and national broadcasting. It should be noted that to some extent, they were successful in this aim. However, the non-governmental sector and community groups managed to create a small sphere where the unrestricted exchange of opinions was possible. In post-revolutionary Ajara there have been attempts to broaden this sphere, and several new independent newspapers were established. Unfortunately, in extremely difficult market conditions this attempt proved unsuccessful.

The newfound interest in journalistic inquiry in post-revolutionary Ajara is, to some extent, analogous to the similar interest in the Kakheti region. In both regions, the local independent media is primarily interested in investigating unsolved crimes related to economic and political activities. In so doing, it tries to oppose the government whenever the actions of the latter remind them of the style and methods of its predecessor. The *Newspaper Batumelebi* (Residents of Batumi) is precisely this kind of publication; it is full of articles criticising the new government's policy on staffing issues. Journalists accuse the post-revolutionary government in Ajara of copying Abashidze's vicious style of rule and creating a new clan regime. Society is showing increased interest in such publications and apparently tends to only trust publications belonging to a particular media organisation. Ajarian society, which lived under an authoritarian regime for a decade, has become rather demanding in terms of the media. The key criterion of trust, in this respect, is of course the degree to which the particular source of mass communication is independent. Only independent media can mobilise public opinion around demands for transparent government. There has already been one such example in post-revolutionary Ajara. Independent press sources actively covered the strike at the TV and Radio Company *Ajara* at the beginning of 2005, as a result of which Batumi citizens sided with the journalists and actively joined in the protests.

The success or failure of the independent media depends on the level to which local civil society structures are developed in the region. For years, the Abashidze regime had prevented or restricted the development of the civil sector in the Ajara region. The most active protests came from

affiliates of Tbilisi-based organisations (such as the Batumi branch of the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association) and the local organisations with which they carried out joint projects, which needed and found support from the independent media to publicise their activities. They in their turn defended the media from the pressure unleashed by the authorities. This mutual assistance and support continues to this day and constitutes the basis for the development of an independent regional media.

## **Batumi**

### **Newspaper *Batumelebi***

The newspaper was founded in 2000 as a limited company. Initially its name was *Batumelebi*, however, a dispute with the newspaper *Ajara PS* meant that its name had to be changed, so it was renamed the *Newspaper Batumelebi*. The dispute was caused by the fact that the monthly magazine issued by *Ajara PS* bore the same name. Both media organisations appealed to the court individually, however the court did not decide in any side's favour and the case remains under examination.

For two years, the *Newspaper Batumelebi* had been working in the worst conditions imaginable for a regional newspaper – under the autocratic regime of Aslan Abashidze. In spite of the pressure and persecution the newspaper faced, it continued to function, and it can be asserted with confidence that it remained the sole disseminator of free speech in the region.

In the period after the Revolution, the tension in its relationship with the authorities has more or less vanished. The authorities have even offered to cooperate with those in charge of the newspaper. The local government is generally benevolently minded towards the newspaper; nevertheless, it sometimes violates the rules of openness guaranteed by law. For example, the newspaper's editorial staff have often requested public information from the Council of Ministers and received no response.

According to the paper's managers, the major change in their relationship with the authorities is that there is no longer any physical threat to journalists. In other respects, some representatives of the new government pursue the same traditions as the old one on certain issues. For example, everyone knows that Aslan Abashidze and his son, Giorgi Abashidze, never gave interviews to the *Batumelebi*. Now some representatives of the new

government are displaying similar attitudes. Several government officials who had agreed to give interviews cancelled meetings with *Newspaper Batumelebi* reporters after they found out what newspaper they were representing. This is because the newspaper has published a number of articles criticising the new government's staffing policies and its attempts to retain clan elements. The newspaper has also exposed members of the National Movement who were engaged in extorting money from businessmen using scare tactics in the period following the Revolution.

Most significantly, the *Newspaper Batumelebi* has never relaxed its focus on human rights. Moreover, the paper's attention to these issues was prominent in the months immediately following the Revolution. The newspaper reported facts where the police had violated the rights of Abashidze supporters, e.g. arresting the demonstrators with false accusations of drug abuse.

The issue of drug addiction in Ajara is one that is close to the *Newspaper Batumelebi*'s heart. It is no secret that Abashidze's regime protected drug trafficking. After the fall of Abashidze's rule, the *Newspaper Batumelebi* dedicated a series of articles to this problem. According to the evidence supplied by the newspaper, the situation in the region has not improved in this respect, except that Subotex has replaced heroin. This suggests to journalists that drug trafficking has not been eradicated, it is just that now it is controlled by a different group. The newspaper aspires to establish and develop the genre of journalistic inquiry. It lists five journalists in its staff, three of which have undergone one-month training in the field of journalistic inquiry conducted by the '60 Minutes' group, headed by Akaki Gogichaishvili from the TV broadcasting company *Rustavi 2*.

In 2004, the *Newspaper Batumelebi* won a three-year grant from IWPR (the Institute for War and Peace Reporting) and became part of a project entitled: *Developing the Regional Media and Public Accountability in Georgia*. The paper's future activities are thus directed solely at its growth. Within the framework of the project the newspaper has received three-year technical assistance and financial support, and has regular trainings on improving the management, marketing and professional skills of its journalists.

Since the Revolution, the newspaper has grown from 12 pages to 16. Its circulation has also increased. It has created a distribution network in the Shuakhevi region using its own resources, and plans to do the same in all regions of Ajara.

The newspaper has its own reporters in every region and allots a page to each of these regions in every issue. Distribution is carried out with the editorial staff's resources and is oriented mainly at subscribers. To motivate subscribers, the editorial staff carried out a one-and-a-half-month publicity campaign in 2004. For the whole of this period, the newspaper was distributed to the local population free of charge. The positive effects of this campaign are obvious. The *Newspaper Batumelebi* has been received positively by readers in all the different districts of Ajara.

Paginating and printing of the newspaper take place in Batumi. Before the Revolution, the local publishing house was banned from printing it; so it was printed in Tbilisi. Today this is no longer a problem, and the newspaper has stable printing in Batumi. It is a weekly edition printed on standard A3 format paper. It is 16 pages long and has a circulation of 2,600 (1,200 of which are subscribers). The cost per issue is 50 tetri.

Its facilities include five computers, a TV, three tape recorders, a power regulator, a generator, a printer designed for A3 format paper and a digital camera.

The newspaper has a staff of 16: editor-in-chief, assistant editor-in-chief, commercial director, two engineering employees, an accountant, an artist/stylist and nine journalists, of which five are regional reporters.

### **Newspaper Ajara**

The newspaper was founded in 1921. Initially it came out under the name *Utskebebi*, and then changed its names several times, becoming *Soviet Adjaristan*, then *Soviet Ajara*, and now *Ajara*. The newspaper publishes in two languages: Georgian and Russian (the predecessor of the Russian language edition of the newspaper was *Batumskii Rabochii*).

During Abashidze's rule, *Ajara* was a government body and it had a very Soviet style of work. The government which came to power after the Revolution changed its attitude towards the newspaper, and now its future is unsure. In particular, the newspaper may acquire limited company status with 100% state participation, and have its funding curtailed. The destiny of the building belonging to the editorial staff, which was built by the editorial staff of the newspaper *Kommunist* for the editorial offices of *Soviet Adjaristan* and *Batumski Rabochi*, also remains uncertain. Presumably, this heavily damaged, long neglected building in the centre of Batumi will join the list of items to be privatised.

The Russian and Georgian editorial staff may also be reduced. Before the Revolution, there was a total of 78 employees working for the newspaper, 31 in the Russian office and 47 in the Georgian. As it was virtually impossible for the newspaper to sell by itself, and it hence had no income of its own, it was completely state funded. In the present circumstances, the new government does not intend to allocate large sums of money to *Ajara* and plans to reform it, meaning it should function within and adjust to market conditions.

The newspaper was a government body for many years, so its editorial and reporting policies were always agreed with the local government of the Autonomous Republic. Material prepared for publication also had to be approved by the local government before it was sent to the publishing house to print. After the Revolution the situation has changed – its content no longer necessarily needs to be endorsed by the government body. Nevertheless, the newspaper continues to work in the old fashion. Its pages report about the activities of the government of Ajara; greater attention is drawn to the positive sides of current affairs, while criticism is scarce.

The newspaper comes out five times a week across eight pages and is printed on A3 format paper. Paginating and printing takes place in Batumi. Before the Revolution it had a circulation of 3,000: 700 in Russian and 2,300 in Georgian. At present, circulation is not stable, and is dependent on the amount of issues sold. The price is 20 tetri per copy.

The newspaper's property includes two cars – a Ford minivan and a NIVA (a gift to the editorial office from Abashidze's government), 10 computers, three printers, two scanners, and three tape recorders.

Only 18 of the 78 employees of *Ajara* are journalists, including those working in the regions.

### **Newspaper *Ajara PS***

*Ajara PS* was established in 1993 and was initially intended for people working in the educational and cultural spheres, i.e. it covered mostly educational and cultural topics. However, due to financial difficulties it temporarily closed in 1995. In 1998, the editor and simultaneously founder of the newspaper resumed its print and registered the newspaper as a limited company. *Ajara PS* has been coming out since February 1998 and focuses on social and political topics.



The Abashidze regime treated *Ajara PS* in the same way as all other independent editions. This was evident primarily from the way public information was denied to the newspaper. After the Revolution, this barrier has to some extent been removed, although similar incidents still take place. The authorities explain such occurrences by the difficulties caused by the post-revolutionary reorganisation process.

In contrast to the old government, the new government does not respond so sharply to criticism in the newspapers. Previously, for example, an article featuring corruption in the health care system under the Abashidze government resulted in a raid on the newspaper's office, carried out by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Autonomous Republic.

The newspaper reports on the current social situation in the region and maps changes in public opinion and social attitudes in the period after the Revolution. Coverage is focused particularly on projects which the government has promised but not carried out, on welfare issues, long-term privatisation loans, the promise to abolish taxes paid by entrepreneurs for two years, and all the problems, which people hoped the new government would solve but the post-Revolutionary government has so far failed to do.

The paper's basic income comes from sales, advertisements and private announcements. Subscription fees add to its stability. The circulation of the newspaper varies between 3,100 and 3,500, a large share of which is its 1,850 subscribers. These subscribers are both individuals and organizations. *Ajara PS* has created a distribution network with its own efforts, covering the Kobuleti, Shuakhevi and Khulo regions, as well as Batumi.

*Ajara PS* received grants from the Embassy of the United States and the Open Society – Georgia Foundation. These grants enabled the editorial staff to optimise and upgrade their technical facilities and increase circulation.

The technical facilities of the newspaper include five computers, two printers, a scanner, a digital camera and 11 tape recorders.

*Ajara PS* is printed in Batumi on A3 format paper. It has eight pages and is a weekly edition (initially it was a monthly edition; since 1998 it became weekly, and in 2003-2004 it came out three times a week). The price is 40 tetri per copy.

*Ajara PS* has 17 employees, 11 of whom are journalists; three of them are reporters in the Khulo, Shuakhevi and Kobuleti districts.

## TV and Radio Company *Ajara*

Ajara State Television was established in 1987, while the Radio dates back 72 years to the Soviet Period. In 1991, the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara decided to unite the two structures into the Television and Radio Committee. Its current status is as a TV and Radio broadcasting department subordinate to the Council of Ministers of the Autonomous Republic of Ajara<sup>5</sup>.

The TV and Radio Company *Ajara* has always been a government structure; its functioning was completely dictated by the policy of the former government of Ajara. Neither the television company, nor the radio section had any opportunity to conduct independent editorial and reporting policies. On the other hand, however, the company received full funding from the government of the Autonomous Republic, which badly needed its own information space both locally and across Georgia to support it in its confrontations with Tbilisi. Hence it is thanks to the efforts made by Abashidze's regime that *Ajara* is technically the best-developed media organisation in Georgia.

The TV and Radio Company *Ajara* has been in a very important stage of its development since the May 2004 Batumi Revolution. The Company has faced the necessity of partially adhering to the rules of the market economy. The removal of state patronage was expressed primarily by the Government of the Autonomous Republic's refusal to compensate the French Company *Globcast* for providing the company with satellite services, which amounted to 250,000 Euro per month. Consequently, *Ajara* stopped broadcasting for four months. The contract signed with the French Company *Globcast* was revised and *Ajara* renewed broadcasting in October 2004<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> After the Batumi Revolution of 6 May, 2004

<sup>6</sup> The contract signed by the Abashidze Government was shackling both for the TV and Radio Company and the Autonomous and Central Governments. E. g. according to the contract, in case the TV and Radio Company was abolished, a certain amount of money was to be paid from its property; and if the property did not comply with the requirements of *Globcast*, the payment was to be made from the budget of the Autonomous Republic or the central budget of Georgia. Under another article, the TV and Radio Company *Ajara* is deprived of the right to enter relationships with other companies providing satellite services. Because of these and other articles of the contract the agreement with the *Globcast* was impossible to terminate; *Globcast* is still providing services to the TV and Radio Company up to this day although with reduced prices.

In spite of the fact that the TV and radio company *Ajara* has 69 masts in Ajara and has transmission units installed on the Kutaisi, Senaki and Lagodekhi masts, difficult terrain creates problems during broadcasting. These problems could be solved by installing a relay transmission line, however this would be more costly than satellite broadcasting. Moreover, satellite broadcasting enables the company to relay its signal across the whole county.

During the period when the Company had its broadcasting terminated a reorganisation process was underway, which meant reducing both staff and company property. If before the Revolution the organization listed 450 employees, after the reorganisation this number was reduced to 250. The property inventory revealed considerable deficiencies.

As noted above, in terms of technical facilities *Ajara* was the most developed TV and radio company in the whole of Georgia. Following the May 2004 events, the then management of Georgian State Television desired to take over the company's technical facilities, making use of documents issued on this occasion by relevant state structures. Fortunately, other media organisations and representatives of the non-governmental and civil sectors managed to prevent the "expropriation" of the company's property. However, as a result of the reorganisation, it was determined that during the Revolution the TV company had lost property estimated at \$300,000, and studio cameras, monitors, office equipment and furniture had vanished in unclear circumstances. The investigation has provided no answers as to who could have plundered the company's property. One version is that the Company's property, might have been taken away by the Abashidze clan and his circle, like other items of material value within the Autonomous Republic. This is confirmed by information, which says that just days before the Revolution the company's, property that was subsequently lost had been moved to the building of the Batumi Maritime Bank, which was the property of the Abashidze family. Many valuable objects from this building have been taken abroad.

*Ajara* used to pursue the information policy of the Abashidze regime and never paid attention to the dismal situation of the Autonomous Republic regarding economic, social, criminal and human rights issues. In this respect, the Revolution did not mark serious changes in the work of the TV and radio company. It remains under state ownership and its management is still appointed by the Council of Ministers of the Autonomous Republic. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the pressure exerted on journalists is

now weaker than it was previously. In other words, if under Abashidze's governance journalists used to carry out the instructions of the Autonomous Government and the leaders of the Company in submission, because there was no self-defence mechanism, now they can resort to different forms of protest and defend their rights, supported by other media and human rights organisations and instead of being instructed, their work is now guided by the principles of journalistic ethics. Beyond doubt, this is a great achievement of the Batumi Revolution, the outcome of which was demonstrated during the strike of the information department of the Company in spring 2005: the Council of Ministers of the Autonomous Republic gave into the journalists' demands that the management of *Ajara*, which was imposing censorship on the television company, be replaced.

The technical equipment of *Ajara* is modern and is capable of performing most complex television operations, although it should also be noted that the personnel is not qualified enough to make the best use of the existing technical potential. *Ajara* has one mobile station for providing live broadcasting.

*Ajara* has an integrated management, which administers all internal structures of both the television and radio sections. Both the television and radio sections have information, creative, and technical departments, administrative and art management staff. The TV management also has a board of artists, which contains both public representatives and company employees.

### **TV company *Channel 25***

This TV company was established in June 1993 and was independent from the outset. It is limited company owned by four shareholders with 25% of the shares each.

In the early stages of its existence, *Channel 25* faced many serious challenges. It rented space in a Batumi government building and was thus forced to make allowances to the local authorities. At the initial stage of privatisation in *Ajara*, the company's founders acquired office space and after 1995 pressures from the local authorities diminished. Nevertheless, *Channel 25* was the object of attacks from the authorities on several occasions.

In 1996, at the initiative of Leonid Dzhgenti, then head of the Committee of the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic for Sport, Educa-

tion, Culture, Health and Social Security, it was demanded that the TV company's founders hand over 51% of the company to members of Aslan Abashidze's family. When the company's owners refused, this demand was raised from 51% to 84%. Soon after, Leonid Dzhgenti, the initiator of this affair, found himself involved in a widely publicised scandal and was eventually forced to flee the country. In short, *Channel 25* managed at that stage to resist the attack from the regional government.

Since 1995, the TV company has had active cooperation with Internews and even became a member of the *Georgian Television Network*, thus enhancing its capacity as an independent media organization. Since 1997-1998, *Channel 25* has been working in cooperation with *Rustavi 2*, and as well as re-transmitting its programs, it has participated in preparing the programme 'Kvira' (*Week*), which belongs to *Rustavi 2*.

This caused a new attack from the leadership of the Autonomous Republic. In February 2000, three founders of the TV company were summoned to the local Ministry of Security and forced to register their shares, 75% of the company in total, to the name of one of its employees. After that, *Channel 25* was deprived of the right to prepare its own news programmes or to transmit certain programmes from *Rustavi 2*.

The TV company ran few programmes of its own throughout its existence, and mostly just re-transmitted *Rustavi 2* programmes. Before the Revolution, *Channel 25* worked on a series of analytical programmes such as the 'Aposyopisis' news programme, the soap opera 'Coffee House', and a documentary series called 'Chronicles of the History of Georgia'. After the Revolution, the founders regained ownership of the company and funding from the Abashidze regime ceased, causing the company to forfeit the majority of its programmes. Today, it runs only one news programme. This is a daily programme and takes up only 30 minutes of the company's airtime.

The relationship between the TV company and the authorities is not tense, although the company often criticises the Government openly. The only form in which the local authorities express their relative irritation caused by unpleasant publications are reproaches expressed in private conversations. For its part, *Channel 25* has complained to the authorities regarding difficulties in attaining public information. The sources which are the hardest to obtain information from are the Prosecutor's Office and local divisions of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The TV Company cooperates closely with different Georgian media organisations. For example, it has transmitted the film prepared by the

‘Reporter’ studio ‘The Case of Marek Dudaev’<sup>7</sup>. *Channel 25* actively collaborates with international foundations. Since the Batumi Revolution it has received two grants – one from IREX and one from the Eurasia Foundation to renovate its technical facilities.

Some 70% of the income of Channel 25 comes from private announcements, obituaries and congratulation messages; the rest is filled up by advertisements. From a financial point of view, the company is not a self-sufficient organisation, and this stems from the fact that, in spite of its technical and personnel potential, it cannot fully make use of its resources and has so far failed to prepare its own programmes, except for the single news programme it runs.

*Channel 25* broadcasts in the regions of Batumi, Kobuleti, and Khelvachauri. The capacity of its technical facilities enables it to spread its signal along the Black Sea Coast up to Poti. If it enhances its signal, it could spread its broadcasting even further, reaching the Abkhazian coastline. *Channel 25*’s broadcasting license is valid until 2012.

From a technical point of view, the TV company meets standard modern requirements. It had DVcam system operator equipment and an assembly device, a studio equipped with modern technology, its own mast and transmission equipment.

The company has information, programming, and technical divisions, managerial, accounting and advertisement departments, and has 40 employees on its roster.

## **Kobuleti**

### **Newspaper *Kobuleti***

The newspaper *Kobuleti* has been published since May 1932 and was initially called *Kobuleтели Kolmeurne* (Collective Farmer of Kobuleti). The newspaper was closed down in 1960. On 1 June 1965 the *Kobuleтели Kolmeurne* was restored to its rights and started coming out under the name *Lenineli* (Leninist). Since 1985, it has been called *Kobuleti*. Taking this name was not meant as a protest against the Communist Party – it was simply that at that time five regions of Georgia already had local Communist Party newspapers with the same name.

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<sup>7</sup> In spite of this cooperation, the company refused to transmit a film prepared by the Reporter studio dealing with the investigation of the circumstances of Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania’s tragic death.

In 1993, the local administration appointed a new editor to the newspaper, who fulfils this function to this day. The present editor is the first female editor in Kobuleti and also the first local to occupy that post in the history of the newspaper. In Soviet times editors were appointed and sent from Tbilisi after approval from the Regional Committee of the Communist Party. The newspaper is still owned by the state.

The newspaper's articles basically report about life in the region, and though it is keeping loyal to the Soviet tradition, its portrayal of village life is very poor. The majority of the population of the region is rural; accordingly, it might be expected that most of the readers would apply to this category. However, the paper shows greater interest in town life than what is happening in the villages. This must be due to the fact that the main "protagonists" in most articles are Kobuleti residents, and most of these articles are dedicated to renowned citizens of Kobuleti. Guests to Kobuleti (politicians, cultural workers) are not ignored either.

In addition to the income received from subscriptions, sales and commercial announcements, the newspaper is subsidised by the regional administration.

The newspaper *Kobuleti* is assembled in Kobuleti and printed in Batumi. It is issued weekly, printed on A3 format paper and takes up four pages. It has a circulation of 1,500 copies, of which 500 are distributed in schools on a subscription basis. The price per issue is 20 tetri.

The newspaper's technical facilities include only one old computer, a printer and a scanner.

The newspaper has 14 employees, including the editor, the assistant editor, the technical editor, a style manager, a proof-reader and journalists.

## **Shuakhevi**

### **Newspaper *Tsiskari* (Dawn)**

This newspaper has been published since 1968. Originally it was called *Drosha* (flag), later renamed as *Shuakhevis Moambe* (Shuakhevi Messenger). In 1993, *Shuakhevis Moambe* was liquidated and a new newspaper *Tsiskari* (Dawn) was founded with limited company status (100% shares are owned by the local administration).

The newspaper covers the region's economic and social problems. The most burning issue, to which the newspaper devotes great attention,

is the lack of land resources and consequent social and economic problems. Almost every issue of *Tsiskari* contains requests to the government to pay attention to the fact that 30% of the population do not have enough grain. The newspaper has many articles dealing with plans to revive tobacco production, as well as initiatives coming from time to time from representatives of the Autonomous Republic and the Central Government.

Many of the articles in the newspaper deal with illegal felling, ecological problems, and the difficult conditions faced by people living in the mudslide and landslide zones (almost 40% of the population). Related to this are articles covering the Georgian Government's migration policy, which suggests resettling people from the highlands of Ajara to Kvemo Kartli.

The income of the newspaper includes subscription fees and subsidies from the local budget. Little money is made from sales and commercial announcements.

The newspaper is a weekly edition and is printed in Batumi with a circulation of 1000. It varies between four and eight pages (depending on the amount and volume of printed material). The paper is A3 format. The price per issue is 30 tetri, and it is disseminated to subscribers in the whole region; their number also varies between 700 and 900.

The newspaper has no technical equipment and its complete print cycle is carried out in Batumi Publishing House.

The newspaper has 12 employees, including editor, deputy editor, executive secretary, four reporters, a proof-reader, and an accountant.

## **Keda**

### **The newspaper *Imedi* (Hope)**

The newspaper *Imedi* was founded 71 years ago. It was and remains the only newspaper in the Keda district. Like other regional newspapers, it is owned by the local authorities.

The newspaper mostly covers the activities of the local government. Though it belongs to the authorities, it nevertheless boldly reports problems that are unpleasant for the authorities. This freedom has become more strongly expressed since the Revolution. The newspaper's articles deal mostly with the social and economic situation, road problems, and illegal felling. *Imedi* gives its readers the possibility to express their views on current



events and problems in the region. The editorial staff dedicates a special heading to the complaints and letters received from its readers.

*Imedi* has no income of its own and is economically completely dependent on the administration of the region, which provides subscribers (staff members of educational institutions and other budget organisations), besides, it covers the printing expenses (1000 lari each month).

The newspaper is printed in Batumi on A3 format paper and has a circulation of 1000. It is a four-page weekly edition. *Imedi* is distributed almost completely among subscribers, which thanks to the efforts of the administration reach 900. The retail price is 20 tetri per issue.

The newspaper's technical equipment includes: a computer, a scanner, a printer and a tape recorder.

The newspaper has 14 employees, including: editor-in-chief, assistant editor, executive secretary, three heads of departments, two reporters and technical personnel.

## **Khelvachauri**

### **The newspaper *Kakhaberi***

The newspaper was founded in 1933. It was not published between 1960 and 1965. In 1965, publication began again, and in 1988 its name was changed to *Oktombris Gza* (The Path of October). From 1988 to 1990 the newspaper came out as *Chorokhi*. Since 1991, it has been called *Kakhaberi*.

The newspaper is funded by the administration (annual budget 18,000 lari). Since a decision by the administration in 1998 the newspaper has been distributed free of charge. For this reason, the newspaper is not commercially oriented, it does not rely on subscribers, and publishes free announcements.

The newspaper's main focus is the work of the administration of the Autonomous Republic. In addition, *Kakhaberi* draws attention to the burning social issues of the region. Before the Revolution, the editorial staff faced danger just by mentioning problems on the pages of its newspaper, so they only ever reported events in a positive light. Today it can publish really critical material. It is true that the editor is often reproached for this by the administration, but things do not usually go any further than this.

*Kakhaberi* has close ties with the Georgian Orthodox Church diocese of Batumi-Skhalti. It publishes interviews with the heads of the diocese and

articles about various religious holidays. The articles are about religious instruction and more generally about education, popular medicine and its tradition in Ajara, the history of the region and its sights.

Recently, significant attention was drawn to the issue of the Russian military base and training ground in Gonio; also to facts of the Russian military installing mines around the base and its adjacent territory, and the possible consequences for local residents and holiday-makers.

Although the newspaper is distributed free of charge by the will of the administration, it still cannot reach people. Village officials are responsible for dissemination, and they often receive issues of the newspaper but do not distribute them. Many people in the region are therefore unaware that the newspaper even exists.

The newspaper is printed in Batumi on A3 format paper with a circulation of 1,000. It takes up four pages and comes out twice a month.

The editing office has no technical equipment and uses the editor's personal computer, photo camera and recorder.

The newspaper has 13 employees: editor, deputy editor, editor's private secretary, head of department, photographer, proof-reader, executive secretary, operator, pagination expert, two reporters, an accountant and an office-cleaner.

## **Khulo**

### **The newspaper *Khulo***

Like other regional newspapers in Ajara, this newspaper also belongs to the authorities of the Autonomous Republic. It must be admitted that the newspaper does not stand out as a critic of the local government, yet its coverage and reporting about the current problems in the region is lively.

The most frequently recurring themes on this paper's pages are those related to the relocation problem and related initiatives by the President. It has published articles about cases of starvation and the relevant social conditions. A large amount of attention is paid to ecological problems, such as erosion, floods, illegal felling and wood fires.

Alongside this, the newspaper also pays a lot of attention to Khulo's historic past, its recreational resources and its potential as a holiday resort.

The Khulo region is traditionally a Muslim area. Although many articles in the newspaper deal with Christian themes, locals are particularly interested in the cultural and philosophical heritage of Abuseridze Tbeli.

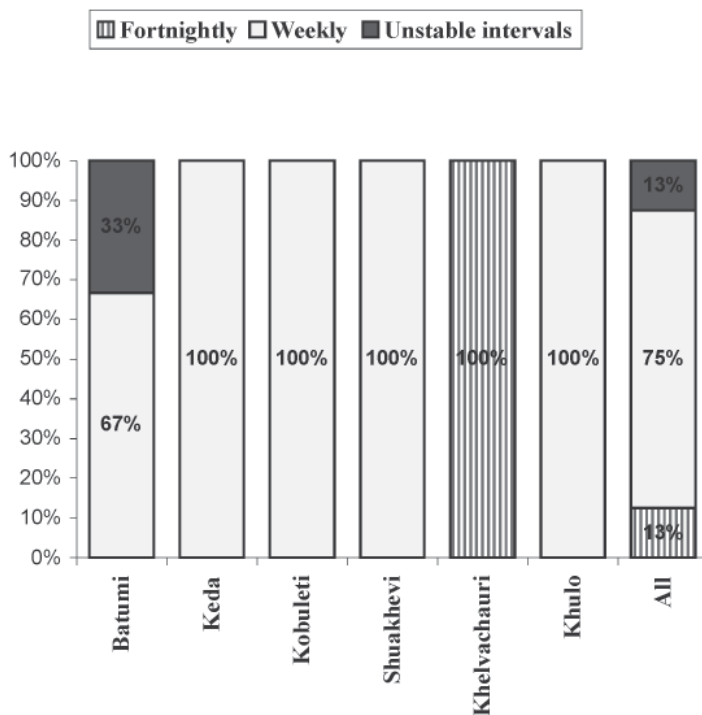
Notwithstanding this popular interest, the newspaper has practically no income of its own. It is completely dependent on funding from the district administration. Because of the difficult terrain in the region, its sales normally require the presence of a well-arranged distribution network, which vanished together with the Soviet-era postal network. Today, readers can purchase the newspaper only in the town of Khulo. From the point of view of sales, the newspaper has faced huge challenges due to the hard economic situation in the district and, consequently, the low purchasing capacity of the population.

*Khulo* is printed in Batumi on A3 format paper. It is a four-page weekly issue and its circulation is 600-800 copies. The retail price per copy is 20 tetri.

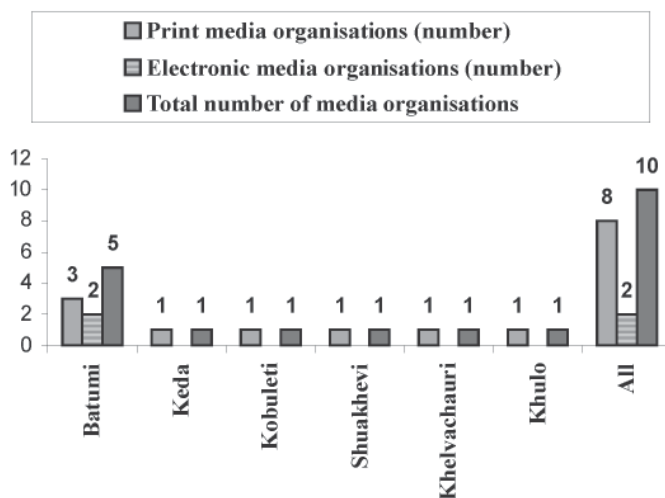
Its only technical facilities are three tape recorders and a photo camera.

The newspaper has 16 employees: editor, assistant editor, executive secretary, head of Information Department, technical personnel, a photographer, journalists, a proof-reader, an accountant and an office cleaner.

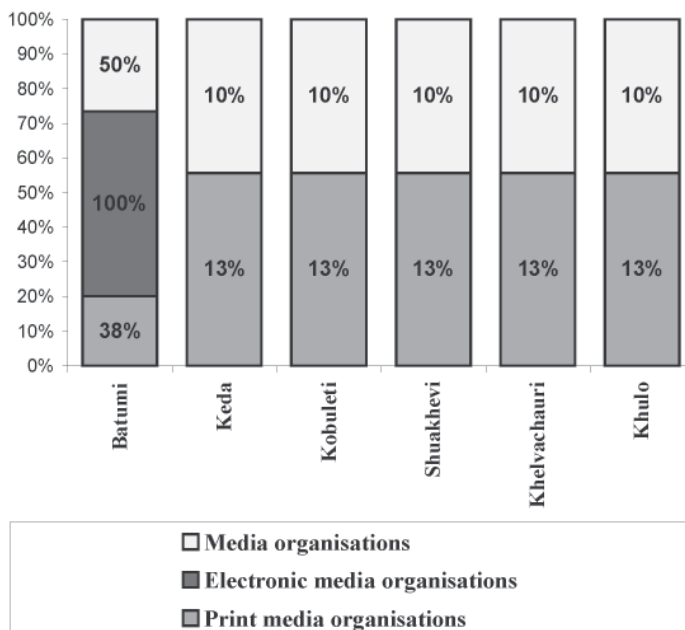
### Publication intervals of print media organisations in Ajara by district



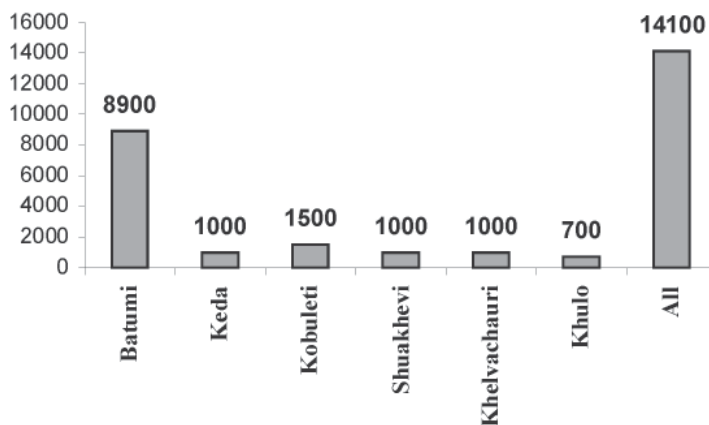
### Number of media organisations in Ajara by district



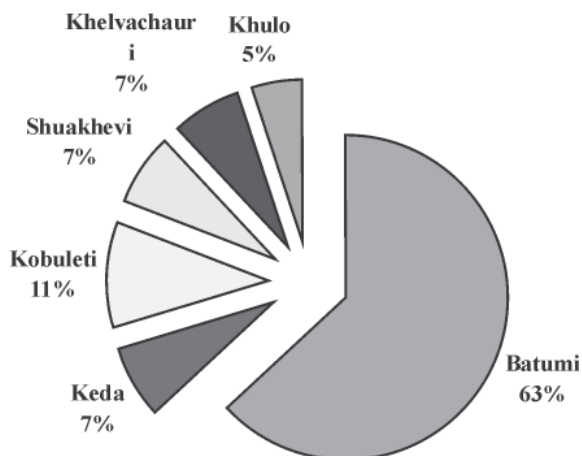
### Percentage distribution of media organisations in Ajara by district



**Overall circulation of print media  
in Ajara by district**



**Pie chart showing overall circulation of print media  
in Ajara by district**



# **RACHA-LECHKHUMI AND KVEMO SVANETI<sup>1</sup>**

Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti makes up 6.8% of Georgian territory and 1.2%<sup>2</sup> of the total population of Georgia. Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti's macroeconomic indicators, with a GDP index of 0.47, rank it in ninth place among Georgia's eleven regions.

## **The Specific Features of the Region and their Influence on Media Development**

Racha-Lechkhumi is a high, mountainous region of Georgia, with very difficult terrain and a severe climate. It has many historical and architectural monuments. The region is rich with mineral waters and natural resources that could encourage tourism. During the Soviet period, tourism in Racha-Lechkhumi used to be quite well developed. However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the infrastructure for tourism was ruined. An earthquake in 1991 greatly affected the region, leaving the majority of people without homes. People in the region are poor. The hard socio-economic situation led to the mass migration of the able-bodied population, which seriously distorted the demographic balance in the local population.

These socio-economic problems are accompanied by a ruined communications network. Some villages in Racha-Lechkhumi are completely isolated from their district centres. They therefore have almost no information about events either in the country or the district; and to crown it all, the power supply is also in crisis.

The weakness of the media in the region is caused by the following reasons:

- The public's low purchasing power results in low demand for print media;
- Because the road infrastructure is in ruins, it is difficult to deliver print editions to villages high in the mountains.

The weakness of the media in the region is also caused by the lack of business; newspapers have almost no advertisements, and announcements are mostly printed free of charge.

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<sup>1</sup> This study of the Racha-Lechkhumi region was held on 19-23 September 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Results of the 2002 census, State Department of Statistics. Tbilisi 2002.

## Differences within the Region by Town

There are four district centres in the Racha-Lechkhumi region (Ambrolauri, Oni, Lentekhi and Tsageri). Each of them has one print media organisation.

The region's media organisations differ according to their legal status. The Ambrolauri paper has limited company status, though it is financially dependent on the district budget. The founder of the print media in the Oni district is the district Gamgeoba. The same situation is encountered in the Lentekhi and Tsageri districts.

## Print Media

There are the same number and type of media organisations in all districts. Printed publications in all four districts are mainly financed by the government. They thus have a low degree of independence, which in turn proves the weakness of the media in the region. The only exception is *Ambrolauris Moambe* (The Ambrolauri Messenger). This newspaper is published in the district centre, where most regional non-governmental organisations are located and where political life is relatively lively. The newspaper tries to cover the problems not only of the district but of the rest of the region as well.

There are several reasons for the weakness of the regional media. One is the fact that public demand for the local media is very low. Local people prefer to get information about events in the country from the central press, while they can learn about local events from other newspapers. There are no independent newspapers in the region. Only *Akhali Lechkhumi* (The New Lechkhumi) has tried to exist independently – when funding from the district budget was cut – but after a year it was forced to become the property of the Gamgeoba of the Tsageri district. Another reason for the absence of independent newspapers is the lack of advertisements. Existing print organisations in the Racha-Lechkhumi region are mostly the legal heirs of the Soviet-era district press, and their existence depends wholly on the good will of the local government.

## Media and Government

The relationship between the media and the government in Racha-Lechkhumi is mostly built on cooperation.



The region's print media exists on funding provided by the local government. The region's newspapers exist not because of public demand for information but because of the tradition for districts to have their own newspapers. These papers pay little attention to issues the local public thinks are problems. Only a very small part of the population actually reads these papers. As a rule, they have a circulation of no more than 500 copies. Most are distributed to subscribers in village Sakrebulos, schools and local enterprises. Since financially they are completely dependent on local government bodies, the region's print media publishes virtually no articles critical of the local government. In general, papers limit themselves to traditional columns and publicistic articles.

## **Media and Society**

Society has a very indifferent attitude towards local media organisations. The only readers of local newspapers other than subscriber organisations are the elder generation, who have a habit of reading local newspapers. Other parts of the society are aware that such newspapers exist, but are not interested in them. This attitude towards the local press can be explained by several factors; the papers' editors argue that:

- The public cannot afford to buy newspapers;
  - Because the roads are so bad, it is difficult for them to distribute papers to villages in the region that are high up in the mountains;
- The authors of this report believe that other reasons can also be added:
- The newspapers are not published efficiently (mostly coming out once a fortnight), so society gets information about current events from other sources (mainly from private contacts);
  - Because of a lack of finances, these papers are not published regularly;
  - In many cases, these papers do not report news or write articles that touch on problems that are interesting to the public.

It should also be pointed out that these newspapers are either government bodies or are financed by the government, so the public does not believe that their information can be objective; rather, they think that these newspapers only serve the interests of the local government.

## Ambrolauri

### Newspaper *Ambrolauris Moambe* (The Ambrolauri Messenger)

This newspaper has been published since 1933. It was first published under the title *Komunari*, then in the 1980s, at the initiative of the editorial board, it changed its name to *Ambrolauris Moambe*.

The newspaper was a body of the Ambrolauri District Executive Committee from its foundation until 1990. It is now registered as a limited company and its founders are the paper's four employees, each with equal shares. Though *Ambrolauris Moambe* formally has limited company status, it would be hard to consider it an independent publication. The newspaper has been receiving financial subsidies from the majoritarian MP and the district Gamgeoba for years. After the Rose Revolution, funding from the district Gamgeoba was cut. The local government offered to make the newspaper a body of the Gamgeoba, since it was mainly financed by the Gamgeoba anyway. The editors have not made up their mind on this issue, although they think that because of the small population and their low amount of sales, the financial assistance of the district Gamgeoba is very important for them.

The newspaper reports the decrees and resolutions of the Gamgeoba and Sakrebulo. It often publishes articles about problems in the district and the region. This refers not only to social (e.g. youth unemployment) and demographic (migration of the population) problems, but also to environmental problems. There have been cases when the local government has responded to problems raised by the newspaper.

The newspaper cooperates with local non-governmental organisations. The paper reports on activities run by NGOs. It also dedicates special pages to coverage of joint activities implemented together with NGOs within the framework of various projects, particularly on human rights and gender issues. The paper also has a couple of traditional columns: 'Our History', and 'The Talent of Defending the Country Is The Most Powerful One', which reports on reforms in the Ministry of Defence. The newspaper actively cooperates with the local Orthodox Eparchy.

*Ambrolauris Moambe* is published once a month. It has a circulation of 500 copies, 250 of which are sent to subscribers, with the rest distributed free of charge. The paper possesses no technical equipment except a camera. After the earthquake in Racha in 1991, the paper was left with virtually

no material or technical resources. The newspaper is edited, designed and printed in Kutaisi on A3 paper. It consists of six pages and its retail price is 40 tetri.

*Ambrolauris Moambe* employs four people: an editor, a deputy editor, a journalist and an accountant.

## Oni

### Newspaper *Oni*

This newspaper was established in 1933. Initially it was called *Gantiadi* and was the body of the Oni District Executive Committee of the Communist Party. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, it changed its title to *Oni*. For the last 15 years, the paper has not been published on a stable basis. A few times it even stopped publishing altogether, but in 2003 it was relaunched. The paper is currently registered as a limited company, and its founder, the district Gamgeoba, is the sole owner. The majoritarian MP from the Oni district played a significant role in relaunching the newspaper. Money for editing, designing and printing is provided by this MP. The district Gamgeoba pays the salary of *Oni*'s director (the paper does not have an editor) from money allocated for the newspaper in the budget, which amounts to 800 laris annually.

The newspaper publishes the decrees and resolutions of the Gamgeoba and also articles about problematic issues in the district. There are also critical letters, though the government does not respond to them. The paper reports on various cultural activities held in the district and publishes articles on religious themes. There is also a traditional column, 'For You, Parents', which writes about correct sexual education for children. Readers have the chance to express their views on various problems on the pages of the newspaper.

The newspaper is published once a month. When periodicity cannot be maintained, several issues are then published at the same time. It has a circulation of 1,000 copies and is spread in the Oni district free of charge. The paper has almost no technical resources. It owns only a dictaphone and a camera. The newspaper is edited and printed in Tbilisi on A3 paper and consists of four pages.

The newspaper employs only one person, who is the director of the *Oni* newspaper limited company.

## **Tsageri**

### **Newspaper *Akhali Lechkhumi***

This newspaper was established in 1999. Initially, the newspaper was a body of the Tsageri district Sakrebulo and Gamgeoba. In 2001 the Gamgeoba stopped providing funding for the newspaper, and as a result the newspaper was registered as a limited company. The newspaper found it hard to exist independently and became the body of the district Sakrebulo and Gamgeoba again in 2002. After that, money was allocated from the budget to finance the newspaper.

The newspaper mainly focuses on the positive changes that have been taking place in the district since the Rose Revolution: rehabilitation of old buildings and roads, etc. Though *Akhali Lechkhumi* is the body of the Gamgeoba, it writes about problems faced by the district – unemployment, illegal cutting of trees, and the water supply. The newspaper also publishes articles about the crime situation in the district.

The newspaper highlights the activities of the Tsageri representation of the NGO ‘Fair Elections’. Once, when there was a case of the police violating human rights, the paper published an article on it, after which the problem was solved and the citizens demands were satisfied. The paper has traditional columns on family, famous children of Lechkhumi, and culture. There are also articles about Orthodox celebrations.

The newspaper is published once a month. It has been published on a stable basis for the last year, though its circulation ranges from 250 to 500 copies. Its retail price is 30 tetri, but it is mostly spread free of charge. The paper fails to find subscribers. The newspaper is financed from the Tsageri district budget to the amount of 7,000 laris. The newspaper has almost no technical resources, only has two dictaphones and a camera. The newspaper is edited, designed and printed in Kutaisi.

*Akhali Lechkhumi* employs a staff of five people: an editor, an executive secretary and three reporters. The papers finances are handled by the district Gamgeoba’s accountant.

## **Lentekhi**

### **Newspaper *Svaneti***

This newspaper was established in 1936. Initially, its name was *Komunizmi*, which was later changed to *Sabchota Svaneti*. At that time, the

paper was the publishing body of the Executive Committee of the Lentekhi District Communist Party. Since 9 April 1989 the newspaper has been published under the name *Svaneti*. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the newspaper was not published on a stable basis till 1993. In 1993 the newspaper ceased to be published at all and only a few issues used to be prepared during elections with money provided by some candidate or party, though legally the newspaper continued. In 2003 the newspaper got funding from the district budget (300 laris a month) and began publication again. The newspaper has no other sources of income; no one is willing to advertise anything, and announcements (congratulations and obituaries) are published free of charge.

The newspaper is currently registered as a limited company. Its founder and sole owner is also the paper's editor.

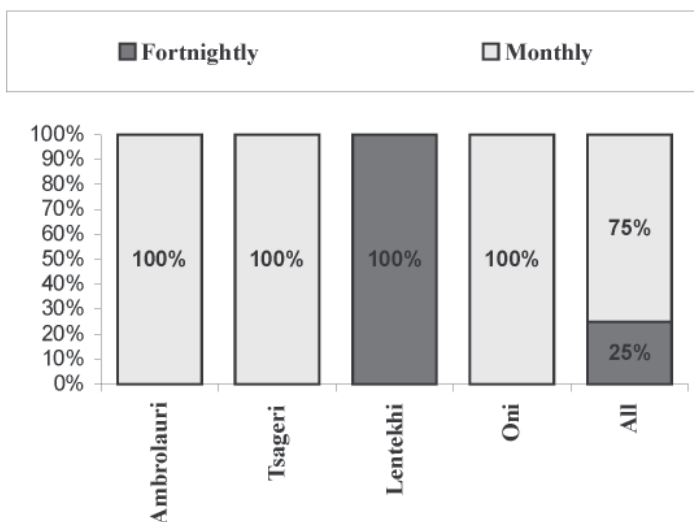
Though the newspaper has limited company status, it is hard to consider it an independent publication. Since the district budget represents the paper's only source of income, it is not critical towards the local government, especially since the Revolution. The newspaper published a few articles on the problem of illegal tree cutting, which caused the dissatisfaction of both the local government and the district population, since cutting trees is people's only source of income.

There are several traditional columns in the newspaper. There is also a *Legal Consultant*.

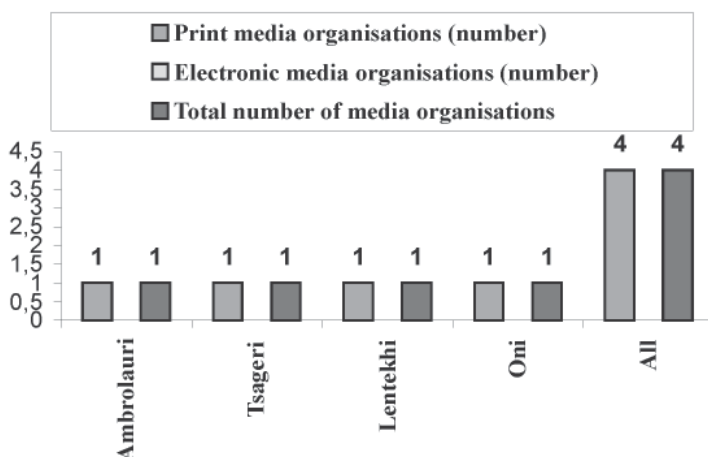
The newspaper has no up-to-date technical facilities or equipment for printing photos in the newspaper. *Svaneti* is the only newspaper that is printed in the local publishing house in Lentekhi. It has a circulation of 500 copies, with a retail price of 20 tetri. However, the newspaper is distributed free of charge in Lentekhi and the village Sakrebulo of the Lentekhi district. The newspaper is printed on A3 paper and consists of four pages.

The newspaper employs a staff of two people: an editor and a deputy editor.

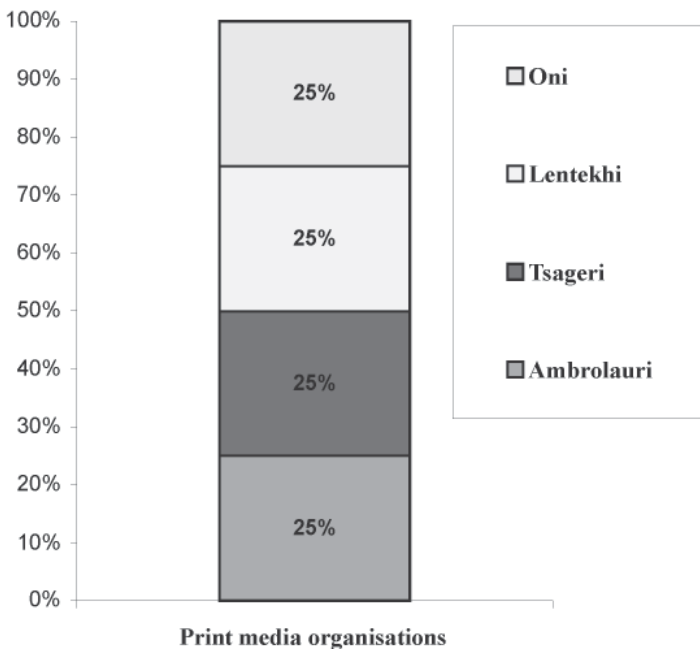
### Publication intervals of print media organisations in Racha-Lechkhumi by district



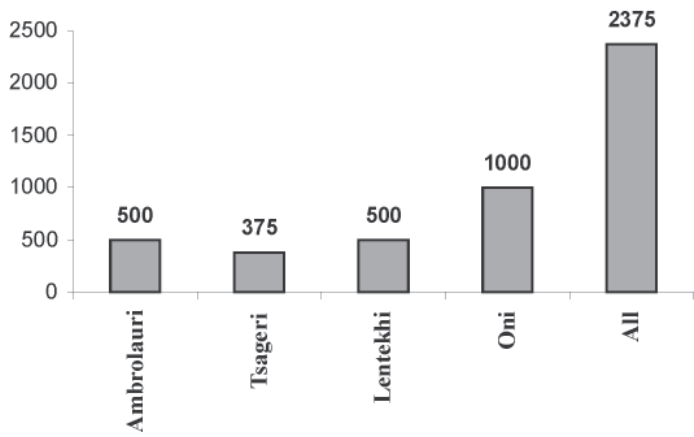
### Publication intervals of print media organisations in Racha-Lechkhumi by district



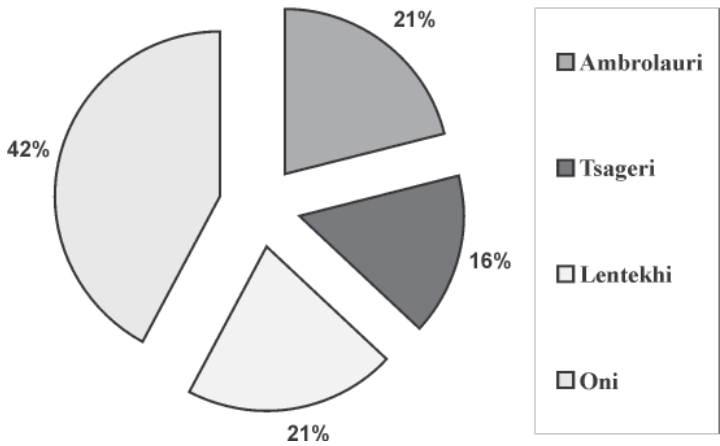
**Percentage distribution of media organisations  
in Racha-Lechkhumi by district**



**Overall circulation of print media  
in Racha-Lechkhumi by district**



**Pie chart showing overall circulation of print media  
in Racha-Lechkhumi by district**





## MTSKHETA-MTIANETI<sup>1</sup>

Mtskheta-Mtianeti represents 9,8% of the territory of Georgia and 2.9%<sup>2</sup> of its total population. 92.8% of its population is Georgians; 7.2% are Ossetians, Azeris, Armenians and others. Mtskheta-Mtianeti's macro-economic indicators, with a GDP index of 0.5, rank it in fourth place among Georgia's eleven regions.

### **The Specific Features of the Region and their Impact on Media Development**

Mtskheta-Mtianeti is a mountainous region and has the most difficult terrain in Georgia. During Soviet times, a good infrastructure for tourism was developed on the basis of its mountainous climate and terrain and its numerous historical and architectural monuments. This infrastructure is now ruined, and the only economic activity in which the population is involved in lumber production and processing.

Its social and economic problems are accompanied by communication problems; because of its high, mountainous geography, the region is in a particularly difficult situation in this regard. With the communications network in ruins, especially the postal service and the telephone network, many people in the country are isolated from what is happening in the country, and this is particularly true in this region. For this reason, the population began to migrate towards the lowlands. These difficulties are getting even worse because of the permanent crisis in power supply. The weakness of the media in the region is caused by the following circumstances:

- The population's low purchasing power results in low demand for print media;
- The collapse of the postal and road infrastructure has made it impossible to deliver print media to remote villages located far from district centres;
- The crisis in the power supply system makes it impossible for the local electronic media to operate normally.

The development of the media in the region is also hindered by the fact that the non-governmental sector is also weakly developed; the latter is

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<sup>1</sup> This study of the Mtskheta-Mtianeti region was held on 12-15 October 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Results of the 2002 census// State Department of Statistics. Tbilisi 2002

better represented in the town of Mtskheta, the administrative centre of Mtskheta-Mtianeti.

In practice, the infrastructure of Mtskheta itself is essentially part of Tbilisi, the capital of the country, and this to some extent explains the weak links between the local non-governmental sector and the local media. Local civic activists tend to involve media from the capital in current affairs, since this can generate more impact.

## Differences within the Region by Town

There are five towns and, correspondingly, five district centres in Mtskheta-Mtianeti. Media organisations are more or less equally distributed across them:

- There are two media organisations in Mtskheta. The first is published within the framework of various projects of the non-governmental organisation Youth Centre and is a not-for-profit publication that does not come out regularly. The other is the publishing body of the local Gamgeoba and Sakrebulo;
- The local media in Dusheti consists only of the Sakrebulo newspaper and a private TV company;
- The media in Akhgori and Tianeti consists of two print organisations, one in each town, that are owned by the local Gamgeoba and Sakrebulo;
- The local government in Kazbegi used to publish a newspaper called *Dariali*, but it has not been published for years, though nor has it been officially closed through the courts.

There is also an independent regional newspaper, *Aragvelebi*, whose editors are based in Tbilisi<sup>3</sup>.

There are a total of seven media organisations operating in the region (if we include *Aragvelebi*, which is published in Tbilisi). Only one of them is electronic, the other six are print media.

Of these organisations, only two are private (one of which, as we have already pointed out, is published in Tbilisi); the first is published by a non-governmental organization and does not represent a separate legal entity. The other belongs to the local Sakrebulo press office and is not a separate legal entity either. Another three organisations are owned by the state (the status of one organisation, the newspaper *Akhali*

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<sup>3</sup> This newspaper is described in the 'Mtskheta' section

*Tianeti* (*The New Tianeti*), is unclear since its legal documentation has been lost).

It may be argued that the media in the region has developed in such a way that there is no imbalance between different towns. If one does not consider the newspaper published by a non-governmental organization within the framework of one or another project, the newspaper *Aragvelebi*, which is published in Tbilisi, and the Dusheti Sakrebulo press office newspaper, which has no legal status, it can be seen that each district in Mtskheta-Mtianeti (except Kazbegi) has just one media organisation, all of which belong to the state. Only one organisation, the TV company *Dusheti*, is privately owned.

## **Print Media**

All of this demonstrates that in terms of quantity, there is no imbalance between the different district centres in Mtskheta-Mtianeti. However, the relationship is clearly unequal when one considers the nature of these organisations. Six of the seven organisations in the region are print media. Yet this does not indicate that the print media in the region is strong; rather, it can be regarded as a sign of the media's weakness, since most of these organisations are maintained by the district Gamgeobas and exist only due to inertia, continuing the existence of Soviet-era publications. There are no favourable conditions for the development of print media in the region at all. No one in the region has taken the initiative to publish an independent newspaper (though a regional newspaper is published in Tbilisi), even though the demand for existing local newspapers is very low. This is due not only to the local population's low purchasing power (some Tbilisi-based publications have successfully become established in the region), but also to the fact that the district newspapers fail to satisfy local readers' interests.

One of the factors hindering the development of the print media in the Mtskheta-Mtianeti region is Mtskheta's (the region's administrative centre) geographical proximity to Tbilisi, the capital of the country. The media in Tbilisi covers events in the region and report them more effectively than the local media, which is less qualified and worse equipped. Because they are so close, district centres in Mtskheta-Mtianeti (particularly Mtskheta, Tianeti, and Dusheti) experience no difficulties receiving Tbilisi-based publications.

## Electronic Media

As mentioned above, the electronic media in the Mtskheta-Mtianeti region is represented by only one media organisation – the TV company *Dusheti*. Towards the end of the 1990s, there was an attempt to establish another television company in the region in the village of Mukhrani, but it broadcast without a license and was soon shut down.

The TV company *Dusheti* is a private entity. It was developed during a period of short-term cooperation with the local government. Currently, the company has to provide for itself using only its own finances. It is very hard to generate finances in Mtskheta-Mtianeti since:

- There is not more or less identifiable business environment in the region, and so the company cannot develop advertising services;
- Due to power shortages in the region, people often do not have the chance to watch local television; consequently, there is no demand for commercial announcements.

The power shortages faced by the electronic media represents one of the most serious problems in the region. The company is sometimes unable to broadcast its programmes for weeks because there is no electricity.

## Media and Government

The relationship between the local media and the government in Mtskheta-Mtianeti is built on cooperation.

As a rule, newspapers published in the region are owned by the local government, or they do not possess the status of a legal entity and are considered to be governmental newspapers. It may be argued that the region's media exists not because of public demand for information but because of the government's traditional perception of its role. District newspapers, which have existed for decades, have turned into a symbol or attribute of the local government, so Gamgeobas consider it necessary to retain a newspaper. This does not mean of course that these local media publications have no audience at all; they are intended for a very narrow segment of local society and are delivered free of charge to district/regional administrations and schools; that is why their circulation, as a rule, is not more than 500 copies.

As for the legally independent media, the lack of public demand makes it very inert; so it pays little attention to providing information to the public and possesses publicistic features.

## **Media and Society**

Society's attitude towards the local media can be described as inert. Most people are aware that newspapers are being published in the district, but do not read them. This can be explained both by the papers' small circulation and by the low demand for them. The fact that most readers are more familiar with press from the capital than the local media should be taken into consideration.

This low public interest is due to the following:

- The media does not distribute information about events taking place in the region effectively, so people have already heard of things before they learn them from the press;
- The local media's contents are not very informative or interesting for a wide audience;
- Due to frequent and long-term disturbances to periodicity, the print media is becoming less and less well known among the public;
- The electronic media naturally manages to attract a significantly larger audience by re-broadcasting Tbilisi-based channels, but the small amount of airtime allocated for local programmes does not provide recent and analytical reports reflecting events taking place in the region.

These reasons are accompanied by a lower degree of public trust in the local media. State-owned newspapers do not inspire the reader's trust. This caution towards the media is strengthened by a perception that the independent media is not impartial either, i.e. that it is serving one or another political party or interest group.

## **Mtskheta**

### **Newspaper *Mtskheta***

This newspaper has been published since 1939. At first, it was called *Komunizmis Gza*, but it changed to *Mtskheta* in 1991. The newspaper was not published from the early 1990s until 1998.

Initially, the newspaper was the publishing body of the Mtskheta District Executive Committee of the Communist Party, but after the collapse of the Soviet Union, ownership was transferred to the District Gamgeoba. The newspaper is currently registered as a limited company and its founders, with equal shares, are the paper's editorial staff and the Mtskheta District Gamgeoba.

Though *Mtskheta* has limited company status, it is difficult to regard it as an independent publication. After they experienced financial vulnerability and low public demand for many years, the editorial board decided to ask the local government to support it. The local government took responsibility for financing the newspaper and providing subscribers. This relationship is reflected in the paper's contents, which focus mainly on reporting the activities of the local government; the newspaper publishes decrees and resolutions from the Gamgeoba and Sakrebulo. Though *Mtskheta* avoids criticising the district government, it has frequently published articles talking about problems in the district, though as a rule such articles simply state the problem and do not go any further. The newspaper writes about government economic programmes, crime and social problems. *Mtskheta* also reports on the activities and events of non-governmental organisations.

*Mtskheta*'s revenue comes mainly from subsidies from the Gamgeoba and money received from subscribers. A small share of its revenue is generated from publishing commercial announcements.

*Mtskheta* is published once a month and two issues are printed at the same time. Its circulation is 600 copies, most of which are delivered to subscribers. The paper has no technical equipment to publish the newspaper; they have only a dictaphone and a camera. It is edited and designed in Mtskheta on a personal computer belonging to one of the paper's employees, but it is then printed in Tbilisi on A3 format paper and consists of eight pages (each issue has four pages).

*Mtskheta* has a staff of four people: an editor, a deputy editor, an accountant and a cleaner. The newspaper also employs a freelance journalist.

### **Newspaper *Aragvelebi***

The newspaper *Aragvelebi* was founded in 1996 by a private individual and is an independent publication. It is registered as a limited company and is completely owned by one person.

*Aragvelebi*'s editors try to keep it running on a commercial basis and avoid having any relationship with the local or central government, including any financial liabilities. This does not mean, however, that the newspaper shies away from reporting political events or maintaining relationships with the political forces, which take part in these processes. Before the Revolution, the newspaper actively collaborated with all political parties who were more or less active and their local activists. During the elections, the newspaper not only highlighted their pre-election programmes, but also accepted orders to print booklets and posters; this was their main source of income during this period. The publication lacks constant and stable sources of revenue. This has an impact on how regularly it is published and causes constant turnover of its editorial staff.

In the first half of 2004, only one issue of the newspaper was published; the owners reckon that the newspaper now comes out monthly. Because there is little or no budget for wages, its journalists have to work without salaries and in many cases do not even get royalties. Most of its employees only work there either for the love of it or to gain experience.

*Aragvelebi*'s owner has never applied to international foundations to try to improve its financial conditions, and the newspaper has received no grants; with its activities, the newspaper tries to attract attention from sponsors. These attempts have not led to any tangible results; only a few issues of *Aragvelebi* have been paid for with the financial support of private individuals.

In terms of its contents, the newspaper tries to satisfy the interests of region's readers. *Aragvelebi* reports on central and regional politics and Mtskheta-Mtianeti's social and environmental problems; it also publishes articles on the history and ethnography of the region. According to the paper's staff, it aims not only to inform people in the region what is going on, but also to allow readers in other regions of Georgia to find about the characteristic features of Mtskheta-Mtianeti. With this goal in mind, part of its circulation is distributed in Tbilisi, Shida Kartli and Imereti.

The paper does not come out regularly and is published more frequently during elections. *Aragvelebi*'s editorial board is located in Tbilisi, where the newspaper is printed.

The newspaper has none of the technical equipment which is necessary for publishing. It consists of twelve pages and is printed in A3 format<sup>4</sup>. Its retail price is 50 tetri.

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<sup>4</sup> The editor of *Aragvelebi* would not say what its circulation was, saying that this was a commercial secret.

The editorial board of *Aragvelebi* employs a permanent staff of four people: an editor, a deputy editor, an executive secretary and an accountant.

### **Newspaper *Balavari***

This newspaper has been published since 2002 on the initiative of a non-governmental organisation, the Mtskheta Youth Centre, and is published within the framework of various projects run by this centre. The newspaper is not therefore registered as an independent organisation, and it is printed for distribution for non-profit purposes.

In six months of 2002, only three issues of *Balavari* were published. Nor was it published regularly in 2003-2004, though it did come out more often.

The newspaper reports on youth problems in the region, such as the migration of young people, unemployment, drug-abuse, trafficking, and crime. The newspaper helps creative young people to make themselves known in society; it publishes creative works by young poets and writers, paintings by young artists, and articles by young historians about the history of Georgia and the region. *Balavari* also pays a lot of attention to human rights, though this is mainly done by publishing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other important documents agreed in various international organizations, rather than by monitoring the existing situation in the region.

*Balavari* highlights the activities and events of the Youth Centre non-governmental organisation and its partner organisations. It also reports on activities run by the the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe Mission to Georgia and the Urban Institute.

The newspaper is published in Tbilisi with a circulation of 500 copies, but its periodicity is not stable. It is printed on A3 format paper, consists of four pages and is distributed free of charge. The Youth Centre does not possess any necessary technical equipment. Three of the centre's employees are in charge of publishing *Balavari*; its contents are provided voluntarily by the centre's staff and other young people who cooperate with them.

## **Dusheti**

### **Newspaper *Gushin, Dghes, Khval* (Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow)**

This newspaper has been published since 1999 on the basis of a resolution passed by the Sakrebulo of Dusheti District. It is not an inde-



pendent media organisation but the information body of the Sakrebulo press service. Correspondingly, the newspaper is wholly financed by the local government.

The majority of the Dusheti District Sakrebulo are members of the Labour Party of Georgia. The newspaper is thus devoted to this party and represents its interests. Judging from the paper's contents, it does not obviously look much like a political newspaper. It refers mostly to problems in the Dusheti District and in the Mtskheta-Mtianeti region in general. Most of the articles do not really criticise the government and do not provide a deep analysis of the issues: they only state facts and problems.

Since *Gushin*, *Dghes*, *Khval* is subordinate to the local government, it is not sold or distributed among subscribers. The Sakrebulo of villages in the Dusheti District transfer the amount of money needed to pay for a set amount of newspapers to the budget of the district Sakrebulo, which in turn provides the necessary money to publish the newspaper.

The Sakrebulo of Dusheti District has no technical equipment to publish the newspaper; the text is edited, designed and printed in Tbilisi. Since *Gushin*, *Dghes*, *Khval* is not an independent organisation and has no commercial structure, it is distributed on a not-for-profit basis and its circulation is only 500 copies.

The periodicity of the newspaper is not stable and it is published on average once every three months. It is printed on A3 format paper and consists of four to eight pages. As mentioned above, the newspaper is not intended for sale and is sent to village Sakrebulo, who then distribute them free of charge.

The head of the Sakrebulo press service is responsible for the newspaper's publication. Another press service employee is also involved.

### ***Dusheti Television Company***

The *Dusheti Television Company* was founded by one person in January 1993 and is a limited company. The company started to develop in the mid-1990s after Koba Buchukuri was appointed Governor of Mtskheta-Mtianeti. The governor was interested in establishing a TV company that could broadcast throughout the whole region and cover areas further afield as well. Collaboration between the local government and the Dusheti Television Company became so intense that in 1998 they purchased a powerful

transmitter which made it possible for the company's signal to cover the whole Mtskheta-Mtianeti region, as well as parts of the Shida and Kvemo Kartli regions, and some suburbs of Tbilisi. At the same time, the government also allocated and renovated an office space for *Dusheti*. In 2000, the National Regulatory Commission for Communications deprived *Dusheti* of its broadcasting frequency. Since then *Dusheti* has only covered the area of the town of Dusheti.

The company is facing severe financial problems. Once *Dusheti* no longer had any prospect of becoming a regional television channel, business cooperation with the regional government ended. Currently, the company depends almost entirely on commercial announcements (mostly obituaries and congratulations) and on royalties for programmes prepared for Tbilisi-based television companies (i.e. *Imedi*) for funding. Even these small revenues are jeopardized by severe power shortages in the region. Dusheti often suffers blackouts for weeks. Obviously, the company then cannot broadcast, and demand for commercial announcements ceases.

The *Dusheti* Television Company cooperates with the Tbilisi-based *Imedi* Television Company, and prepares programmes/items about ongoing events in the region, particularly in the Dusheti district; it also broadcasts *Imedi*'s programmes. *Dusheti*'s own programmes are on air from 21:00, but they occupy little time. *Dusheti* has its own news programme, which is not broadcasted daily or on a regular basis. The company prepares analytical and publicistic programmes where most attention is paid to issues such as demographic and migration problems in the region, and the hard social, environmental and crime situation. *Dusheti* also prepares documentary films. One of them, 'I See Dreams in Russian' (in Russian), won a 'grand prix' at the Yalta International Film Festival in 2003. *Dusheti* has also prepared other documentary films: 'Extinction', 'Women and the Economy', etc.

*Dusheti*'s technical equipment consists of two computers, an editing table, a digital camcorder, a mixer, a few TV sets, and a transmitter. The company broadcasts with a 5-watt transmitter and its signals only cover the town of Dusheti.

The television company employs a staff of four: a director, a journalist, a cameraman and a technical assistant.

## Tianeti

### Newspaper *Akhali Tianeti*

This newspaper has been published since 1932. It used to be the publishing body of the Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Tianeti District. Initially, the newspaper was published under the title *Collective Cattle Breeding* during the Soviet period, but its name changed twice and it was published first as *Tianeti* and then as *Akhali Tianeti*. In 1991, after Georgia declared independence, the first word was removed from its title and it became *Tianeti* again. However, when a new editor came in 2003, the newspaper returned to the name *Akhali Tianeti*.

*Akhali Tianeti* is the publishing body of the Gamgeoba and is financed from the regional budget. The newspaper was not published during the 1990s and was restored only in September 2003. This was because the ruling party at the time, the Citizens Union of Georgia, needed the newspaper to publish the articles they wanted, but the newly-appointed editor managed to publish articles that criticised the government in a few issues that had been financed by the Gamgeoba. This led to its finances being cut and the newspaper was not published until February 2004. With the efforts of the Gamgebeli appointed after the Rose Revolution it became possible to allocate stable financing for the newspaper. The newspaper is currently published on a monthly basis.

*Akhali Tianeti* tries to report all issues that are interesting for local readers. It publishes not only decrees and resolutions from the Sakrebulo, but also highlights the socio-economic, environmental and other problems faced by the district. There is a column in the newspaper called 'Our Famous Compatriots', which publishes bibliographic data and interviews with famous people from the district. The newspaper also reports on the sports and cultural life of the district.

*Akhali Tianeti* does not possess any property of its own. The text is edited on the computer of the District Gamgeoba, and is then printed in Tbilisi. The editor uses his own dictaphone and camera to prepare articles for the newspaper. Since the paper represents the publishing body of the Gamgeoba and is a not-for-profit organisation, its circulation is only 500 copies and it is delivered to the population free of charge. The newspaper is printed on A3 format paper, contains four pages and is published once a month.

Two people are involved in publishing the newspaper: an editor and a journalist.

## Akhalgori

### Newspaper *Akhalgori*

This newspaper was established in 1937. It used to be the publishing body of the Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Leningori (Akhalgori) and was initially published under the title *Stalinon/Stalineli*. Later, its name became *Lenineli*. Since the district of Leningori was part of the Autonomous Republic of South Ossetia during the Soviet period, the newspaper was published in Ossetian and Georgian. It has been published under the name *Akhalgori* since 1991 and is currently published only in Georgian.

The newspaper does not have the legal status of an independent organisation. It is the publication of the Gamgeoba and Sakrebulo of the Akhalgori district. Correspondingly, *Akhalgori*'s existence depends entirely on the local budget.

The paper's contents are defined by the local Gamgeoba, and most of it is dedicated to the decrees and resolutions of the Gamgeoba and Sakrebulo. It also publishes articles on the history of the district, its culture and tradition of the tolerance regarding other nations and other issues.

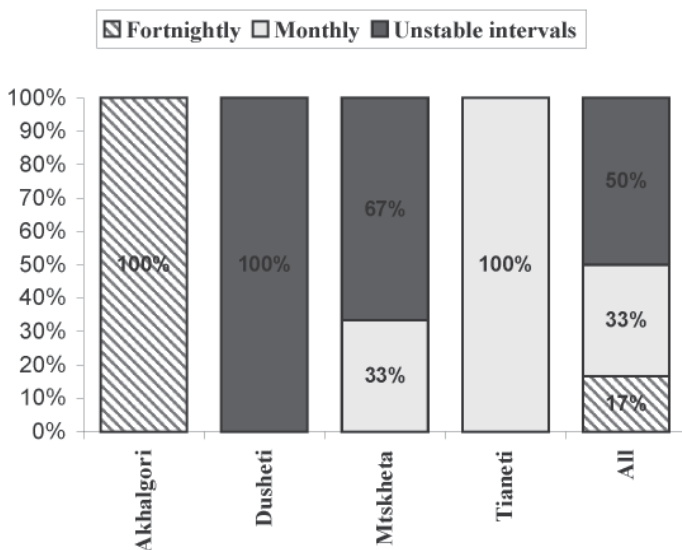
*Akhalgori* is delivered to village Sakrebulos free of charge. Though the newspaper is not printed in Ossetian, it is spread in Ossetian villages as well.

The paper's editorial board has kept its old building but it possesses almost no technical equipment. The text of articles intended for publishing in the next issue is edited on the Gamgeoba's computer, but it is then designed and printed in Tbilisi. The newspaper does not possess any dictaphones or cameras. The paper's staff use their own technical equipment to prepare their articles.

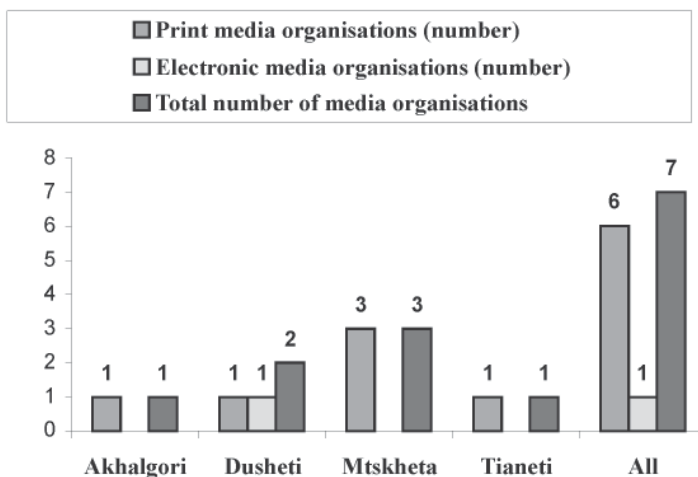
*Akhalgori* is financed by the district Gamgeoba, which allocates 9,800 laris annually on a stable basis. The finances provided are sufficient to publish the newspaper once a fortnight with a circulation of 300 copies. The newspaper is printed on A3 format paper and consists of four pages, with a retail price of 30 tetri. However, since it is not sold, it is delivered to the population free of charge through the Sakrebulo.

*Akhalgori* employs six people: an editor, four reporters and an accountant.

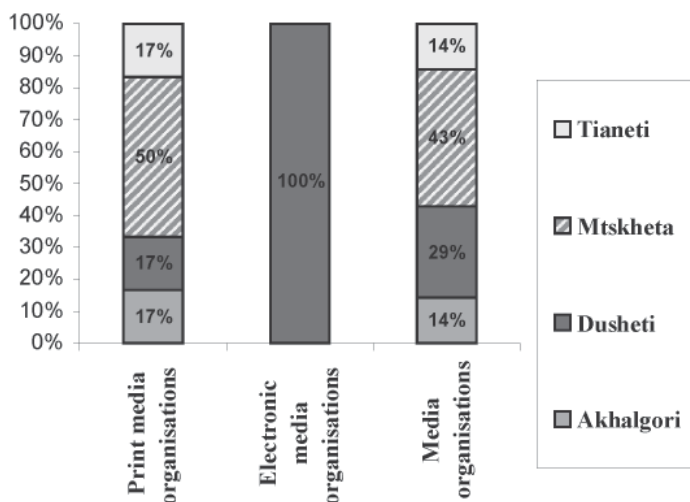
### Publication intervals of print media organisations in Mtskheta-Mtianeti by district



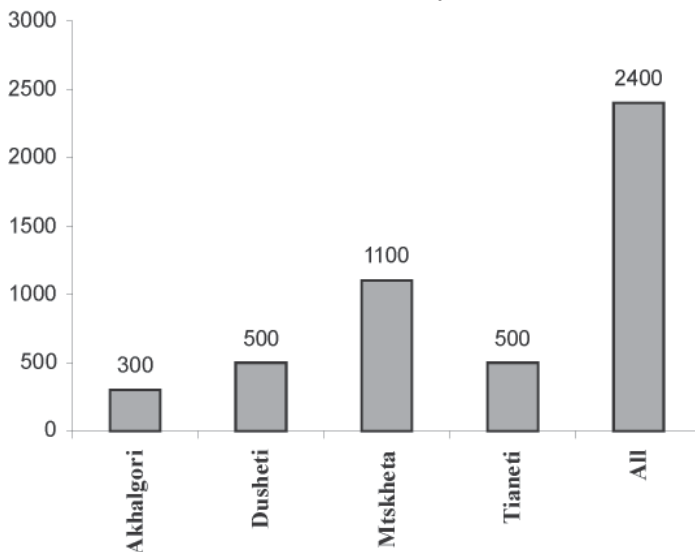
### Number of media organisations in Mtskheta-Mtianeti by district



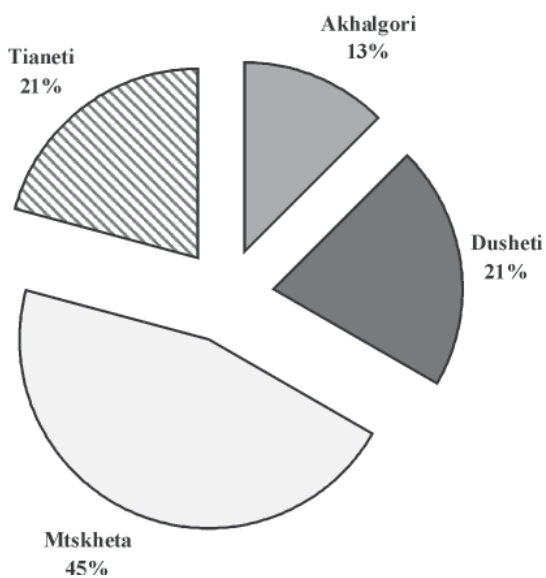
**Percentage distribution of media organisations  
in Mtskheta-Mtianeti by district**



**Overall circulation of print media  
in Mtskheta-Mtianeti by district**



**Pie chart showing overall circulation of print media  
in Mtskheta-Mtianeti by district**



## SHIDA KARTLI<sup>1</sup>

The Shida Kartli region makes up 8.3% of Georgian territory and 7.1%<sup>2</sup> of the total population of Georgia; 91% of the region's population are Georgians, while the other 9% are representatives of other ethnic groups, mainly Ossetians. Shida Kartli's macroeconomic indicators, with a GDP index of 0.49, rank it in sixth place among Georgia's eleven regions.

### **The Specific Features of the Region and their Influence on Media Development**

The most developed industry in the Shida Kartli region is agriculture. The Soviet-era industrial infrastructure in the towns has collapsed, with the exception of the town of Kaspi, where a cement factory is still running. The region's agricultural infrastructure is still at least partly functioning since privatisation. This economic situation affects the local public's purchasing power, and the situation for the local media is far from advantageous. As a result, most of the local media prefers to cooperate economically with, or be owned by, the local political elite.

The Shida Kartli region borders on the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone, which has a significant impact on its socio-political and economic life. The local media thus focuses its attention on the following issues:

- Georgian-Ossetian relations and problems of peace and stability;
- The social situation of people living in the Tskhinvali region and local and central government policy in this regard;
- Smuggling, and the actions of the local economical and political elite with regard to this issue, which do not seem to be transparent;
- Crime in the region;
- The current situation in the conflict zone and the Shida Kartli region in general with regard to human rights;
- The work of law-enforcement structures.

The local media tries to report these issues as much as it can. However, basic study and discussion of these issues is also hindered by other factors:

- Since the region borders on the conflict zone and state bodies are thus more active here than in other regions, journalists have limited room

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<sup>1</sup> This study of the Shida Kartli region was held on 26-29 October 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Results of the 2002 census, State Department of Statistics. Tbilisi 2002.



for manoeuvre since it is considered unacceptable to report certain political and other issues;

- There is no willingness to cooperate between the local government and law enforcement bodies;
- The conflict zone provides a good infrastructure for the maintenance of a shadow economy, involving local and central government representatives (from both the Georgian and Ossetian sides) and businessmen. They want to ensure that negotiations and arguments between them remain confidential. To this end, there are numerous cases of journalists coming under pressure, being threatened or assaulted.

The factors listed above apply primarily to media organisations in Gori. In other towns, the media mostly belongs to the local government and has no independent activities. These organisations mostly just state what local problems there are and report the activities of the local government.

### **Differences within the Region by Town**

There are a total of ten newspapers and one television company in the region. Gori, the region's administrative centre, has notably more media organisations than any other place: there are six media organisations – five newspapers and a television company. Two of these newspapers are the legal heirs of papers that used to be published in Tskhinvali during the Soviet period. In other towns, the local media consists of one newspaper each, except Khashuri, which has a television company and a local government newspaper.

Most of these local media organisations belong to the government. Only three of the 10 media organisations are privately owned, the rest belonging to the local government. The only exception is the television company *Dia*, which was founded by private individuals but now partly belongs to the state.

There are proportionately more print than media organisations in the regional media. There are only two television companies in the region. Two of the three independent organisations are newspapers, whilst the third is a television company. All three are located in Gori. The television company and one of the two newspapers both belong to one person; this can thus be regarded as a small media holding.

The contents of the regional media also differ according to location. For example, the media in Gori pays more attention to issues such as conflict,

smuggling, corruption in the local government, and human rights, whereas the newspaper published in Kareli focuses on agriculture and the local government's actions in this regard; Kaspi's paper discusses the environmental situation, given the district cement factory in the area, and also reports on medical and health issues; the media in Khashuri reports on the local government's activities and on government plans and development programmes for the district.

## **Print Media**

As has already been noted, the print media makes up a large share of the media in Shida Kartli. Eight newspapers are published in the region, the majority of which are dependent on financial support from the government. The independent media consists of two newspapers, one of which is staffed by people who left the only other independent newspaper in the region.

In general, the print media situation in Shida Kartli can be described as very vulnerable, with independent print editions existing only in the region's administrative centre. There are several reasons for this:

- Civil society in the region, which should be actively involved in the development of the public sphere, is weakly developed. The non-governmental organisations that are active in the region are branches of Tbilisi-based organisations, which can also state their case in the Tbilisi-based media;
- Local society is neither politically nor socially active;
- The current economic environment provides little opportunity to create an advertising market which could generate revenue for the media;
- International organisations and foundations have built cooperative relationships with the region's only independent television company and the newspaper belonging to the same owner, which have functioned on this basis for a long time already;
- Financially vulnerable media organisations are tempted to collaborate with the local government.

It is also very important to consider how the print media is perceived by local society. Potential readers regard the independent media as a tool for a particular person or group to represent their interests; this perception has an impact on the sales of independent newspapers. As a rule, newspapers published in Gori have a circulation of about 1,000 copies, most of which are not

sold directly. Of course, readers also have little trust in print media owned by the government, but the local government provides the newspaper with subscribers, which means that they have a stable circulation.

## Electronic Media

As mentioned above, there are two television companies in Shida Kartli. One of them, the *Trialeti* company, was founded by and belongs to a private individual. The other, the *Dia* TV Company, was founded by two people, but belongs in part to the local government. Both companies' level of independence is defined by how far they cooperate with the local government. *Trialeti*'s owner is an activist of the governmental party United National Movement and represents this party in the Georgian Parliament as an MP. It is thus hard to say whether the company can report current affairs without considering the political situation. *Dia* depends heavily on the Government's position on one or another issue when operating.

It is hard to compare how well these two companies operate since they both possess different material, technical, and human resources. *Trialeti* has received grants from international organisations and foundations for years in order to upgrade its material and technical resources and improve its journalists' qualifications. *Dia*, which is part-owned by the local government, has never received any grants. Hence, while in terms of technical and human resources, *Trialeti* can be considered one of the leading regional electronic media organisations in Georgia, *Dia* can be placed among the most vulnerable.

## Media and Government

In Shida Kartli, as in most regions of Georgia, the Government suspects the independent media of being a tool to turn public opinion against the government. The independent media has been actively pressured and restricted for some time. One example of this is that the editor of the independent newspaper *Khalkhis Gazeti* (The People's Newspaper), which is published in Gori, was taken to court. Non-governmental organisations from Tbilisi became involved in this issue, and the case had a considerable impact right across the country.

Media organisations subordinate to the Government provide a point of comparison to the situation for the independent media. They are distributed

to a local audience more regularly and in a more stable way because the local administration takes care of this.

Since the electronic media is more effective than print media and has a larger audience, the Government decided to make it a priority to keep the electronic media under control. This tendency had formed shortly before the Rose Revolution. *Dia* was completely private, but thanks to the efforts of the local administration, part of it was obtained by the Gamgeoba. After the Rose Revolution, especially in summer 2004 when the situation in Tskhinvali Region was particularly tense and complicated, the regional government demanded part of the *Trialeti* company. Thanks to the active involvement of the non-governmental sector and the management of the company's good contacts, the government failed to achieve any success. The *Kartli Television Company* in Gori stopped broadcasting after the Rose Revolution. The local government puts this down to the company's financial problems, but according to local NGOs, the company was the victim of a clash with the local government.

## Media and Society

Society in Shida Kartli is passive and has little trust in the media. Most newspaper readers (people above 40) are not used to the standards of modern journalism and think that when any newspaper publishes scandalous information, this must have been ordered by a particular group or person. Most of the print and electronic media's audience prioritise publicistic articles. However, some changes can be observed since the campaign and legal case that started against the editor of *Khalkhis Gazeti*. This paper's audience increased and local readers started to become more interested in investigative journalism.

Non-governmental organizations in the region are mainly located in Gori and only represent a significant force against the government when they work in coalition with Tbilisi-based NGOs. The only exception in this regard is the Gori representation of the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, which actively protects the principles of media freedom and provides practical assistance to media representatives, not only by protecting their rights but also by bringing cases to court in order to overcome administrative barriers faced when searching for public information.

## Gori

### Newspaper *Goris Moambe* (The Gori Messenger)

This newspaper was founded in 1994 by the Gori District Gamgeoba. It is a limited company but belongs completely to the local government.

*Goris Moambe* is not diverse in content and mainly reports the local government's activities. It also publishes the resolutions and decrees of the town hall and the Sakrebulo. The editors try to give the newspaper a critical edge, but they have not been completely successful. For example, they published an article on corruption in which the author tried to discuss the current situation without giving particular names. Though this article was quite mild, the editor of the newspaper was made to visit representatives of the government, who upbraided him for publishing it. After this, the relationship between the editor of *Goris Moambe* and the regional governor's office became strained, following which the newspaper published several articles about corruption in education and agriculture. Nonetheless, its general character has not changed: it continues to be a publicistic and essayistic newspaper, which places little emphasis on facts or analysis.

*Goris Moambe* has almost no revenue of its own. It receives little money from advertisements and commercial announcements, but this is counterbalanced by money received from a computer centre which operates under the aegis of the newspaper. The newspaper receives an annual subsidy of 14,000 laris from the local budget, which is used for publishing and does not even cover the payment of minimum salaries.

The newspaper is edited and designed at *Goris Moambe*'s computer centre, but is then printed in Tbilisi on A3 format. It consists of four pages and is printed weekly with a circulation of 1,000 copies. Most of these (700 copies) are distributed to subscribers who are signed with the help of the local government and Sakrebulo of villages in the Gori district.

The paper's technical equipment consists of two computers only. The paper also uses the editor's personal camera.

*Goris Moambe* employs a staff of four: an editor, a deputy editor, a proof-reader and a journalist.

### Newspaper *Shida Kartli*

This newspaper is the legal heir of the newspaper *Sabchota Oseti* (The Soviet Ossetia), which was published in the former autonomous region of

South Ossetia in the Georgian language. After the 1991-1992 conflict, the paper's editors, who became displaced (IDPs), continued to publish the newspaper under the title *Shida Kartli*.

The newspaper depends entirely on government finances, which are so small that the paper's employees have not received salaries for years; this money is used only to cover the expenses of publishing the newspaper. *Shida Kartli* is distributed to IDPs from the Tskhinvali Region, and also to Georgian villages in the gorge of the Didi and Patara Liakhvi rivers. *Shida Kartli* writes very little about politics; most of its articles are about Georgian-Ossetian relations and the history of the region.

The newspaper has no technical equipment. It is edited and using the local government's technical resources. The paper is printed on A4 format paper, consists of four pages and has a circulation of 1,000 copies.

*Shida Kartli* employs a staff of 25 people; most of these do not in fact do any work, but are old staff members and have been kept on the staff list.

### **Newspaper *Literaturuli Tskhinvali***

This newspaper, like *Shida Kartli*, was founded by displaced journalists with the help of contributions made by the Georgian Parliament and the Writers Union, which have provided funding ever since.

The paper publishes creative works by Georgian and Ossetian writers, information about cultural activities held in the Tskhinvali district, and articles on Georgian-Ossetian relations, the past, and the present state of affairs in the region. Sometimes it also publishes political articles, which mainly deal with conflict resolution issues and the situation in the Tskhinvali region.

*Literaturuli Tskhinvali* has no technical facilities. It is edited and designed in Gori and Tbilisi with government help. It is printed on A3 paper, contains twelve pages, has a circulation of 500, and is published once a month. It is distributed free of charge.

The newspaper employs a staff of 13 people.

### **Newspaper *Khalkhis Gazeti* (The People's Newspaper)**

This newspaper was first published in 2003 by the non-governmental organisation, Gori Debate Club. *Khalkhis Gazeti* was initially established as an independent organisation and is registered as a limited company.

*Khalkhis Gazeti* was established after a dispute within the local independent newspaper *Trialeti*, which is published in Gori and is regarded as

a branch of the television company of the same name, since they have the same owner. The founder and editor of *Khalkhis Gazeti*, Revaz Okruashvili, used to work for *Trialeti*. However, after the 2003 Rose Revolution, *Trialeti*'s owner and founder became actively involved in politics and was on the United National Movement's party list for the supreme legislative body. This of course influence the independence and working style of both the TV company and the newspaper. For this reason, some of the paper's personnel, led by Okruashvili, decided to leave *Trialeti* and set up their own independent newspaper. The NGO, Gori Debate Club had already been established with Okruashvili as its chairperson. This organisation's technical and human resources enabled the journalists from *Trialeti* to found their own newspaper.

The peak of *Khalkhis Gazeti*'s activities coincided with the deterioration of the conflict situation in the Tskhinvali Region in summer 2004. The newspaper published articles on corruption and abuse of the law within the local government, and actively reported on events taking place in Tskhinvali and also on violations of the law uncovered by the anti-smuggling operation. Smuggling, and the involvement of local government representatives in it became the paper's most important topic and main focus. This gained the government's attention, and the paper then began to come under pressure. At first, this pressure on the editor and his staff mostly consisted of threats, but it then went on to take other forms.

At the start of August 2004, the law-enforcement agencies launched a special operation to identify and arrest drug dealers in Gori. Revaz Okruashvili, the editor of *Khalkhis Gazeti*, was the only victim of this operation. According to human rights defenders both in Tbilisi and locally and representatives of the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, Okruashvili was arrested illegally and in violation of procedural norms of the Criminal Code; for example, the seizure of illegal drugs and other evidence was witnessed by an intern of the Gori Police Station and by the brother of someone suspected of robbing Okruashvili's flat, i.e. by interested parties. According to a statement by the local human rights defender, systematic pressure was put on the judge and the detained man's lawyers during the trial. Despite attempts by local and Tbilisi-based NGOs to protect *Khalkhis Gazeti*'s editor and to guarantee a transparent trial, Revaz Okruashvili was sentenced to three-month preliminary detention. However, it proved impossible to keep this a local matter, and these events had the potential to cause a serious scandal, so a few days after the verdict was made, a procedural

agreement was made with the detained man on the initiative of the Prosecutor's Office. Like the whole investigation and trial, this procedural agreement was not transparent; Okruashvili was made to sign a document, according to which he rejected services provided by lawyers from the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association. A lawyer was selected as agreed with the Prosecutor's Office to work on the procedural agreement. Once this agreement was made and the punishment for the crime was declared, Okruashvili was released. This arrangement foresees further cooperation between the accused and the law-enforcement agencies; otherwise the prosecutor has the right to renew the case, and since the accused person has already confessed to the crime, a verdict can be made without a new investigation. This enables the local government to influence *Khalkhis Gazeti* if necessary. Despite this, the newspaper has not become more compromising or loyal towards the government.

The newspaper continues to publish materials related to smuggling and corruption in government bodies. After Revaz Okruashvili was released, a series of articles was published dedicated to violations of the law in detention cells and violations of procedural norms in the investigation process.

*Khalkhis Gazeti* received a grant from the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* in summer 2004, which supports the newspaper's organisational and technical development. The paper's staff regularly attend trainings to improve their reporting skills, acquire knowledge in marketing and management, and improve technical issues related to the newspaper's preparation. During this period, most of *Khalkhis Gazeti*'s print run was selling regularly, and the paper started to focus on increasing its number of subscribers.

The paper is edited and designed in Gori, but is printed in Tbilisi on A3 format paper. It consists of 12 pages and is published once a week. It has a circulation in the range of 500-700 copies. Some of these are distributed to subscribers; the rest are sold with a retail price of 40 tetri.

The paper's technical equipment consists of three computers, three printers, a scanner, three dictaphones and a digital camera.

The newspaper employs a chief editor, two technical assistants, a proof-reader, a marketing specialist and six journalists. As well as these staff, *Khalkhis Gazeti* also has freelance reporters in Tskhinvali, Khashuri and Kareli.

### **Newspaper *Trialeti***

This newspaper was founded on the basis of the *Trialeti* television company in 2001 and is registered as a limited company. It started to be



published regularly in 2003. Initially, the paper depended on the material, technical and human resources of the TV company's news department, but little by little it managed to mobilise its own revenues, and is now a separate organisational entity.

At first, the newspaper focused mostly on news, but then the editorial board considered its readers' interests and decided to diversify the contents of the newspaper. *Trialeti* therefore added sections on culture, sports, medicine and religion. The paper pays a lot of attention to letters and phone calls from readers asking the newspaper to report on issues that interest them.

The newspaper actively covers the situation in the conflict zone and anti-smuggling policies. It does not avoid topics that the local government does not like, such as corruption and the participation of members of the local law-enforcement agencies in smuggling. *Trialeti* has paid a lot of attention to human rights in the region. Clearly, this also involves confrontation with the Government. Before the Revolution, reporters were frequently threatened or assaulted and their equipment damaged. There have also been cases of pressure being applied on the newspaper since the Revolution. An article about violations of the law in the Tax Department was followed by a whole series of threatening phone calls against the journalist.

On one occasion, the court was also used to put pressure on the newspaper. The paper published an article about the head of the Election Commission in Gori and included his photograph. This photo was used as a reason to take the paper to court. The head of the Election Commission claimed that he did not like the fact that he had a beard in this photo and took it as a private insult. He demanded monetary compensation from *Trialeti*, arguing that a photo of him wearing a beard has a negative impact on his image as a single man. The court agreed and obliged the paper to pay moral compensation.

The newspaper's technical equipment consists of three computers, a scanner, a printer, a digital camera and three dictaphones. It is edited and designed on site, but is then printed in Tbilisi on A3 paper. The paper consists of 12 pages and is published once a week with a circulation of 1,000 copies. Its retail price is 50 tetri.

*Trialeti* employs a staff of six people: an editor, a technical editor, a corrector and three correspondents.

## ***Trialeti* Television Company**

This television company was founded in 1990 by two private persons. It is registered as a limited company and is a family business.

Initially, the company had to operate in very hard conditions, and was broadcasting only with a few VCRs and a TV set. However, it soon attracted the attention of international organisations, which supported the company in improving its material and technical resources and improving its staff's qualifications. The company has received four grants from the Eurasia Foundation; grants from the Open Society – Georgia Foundation and the Embassy of United States; and it has also received technical assistance from IREX. *Trialeti* journalists regularly participate in trainings and seminars arranged by Internews. All of this has helped the *Trialeti* TV company to establish itself as the most powerful media organisation in the region; it has a distinguished position in Georgia's regional media.

*Trialeti* is a partner of the Tbilisi-based television company *Rustavi 2*, and has an agreement to broadcast its programmes. This cooperation does not extend to financial matters and only gives *Trialeti* the chance to fill up its airtime. *Trialeti*'s own programmes include: news updates five times a day; a daily news programme in Ossetian; a talk show called 'Theme'; a weekly analytical programme, 'Theme of the Week', where interesting events of that week are discussed with invited guests; an entertainment talk-show, 'Guest of the Region', where politicians, actors, and famous people are invited from Tbilisi; an entertainment programme, 'Famous Faces'; a literary programme, 'Lira'; and a cycle of programmes prepared by the television's children's studio.

The company's main source of revenue is advertisements and commercial announcements, obituaries and congratulations; together with grants from international organisations, these provide enough money for the channel to operate.

The pre-Revolution government was not satisfied with the television company's activities, and neither is the post-Revolution government. Although the company's founder is a Member of Parliament from the Government party, *Trialeti* has remained critical even after the Revolution, though it had to compromise, and stopped broadcasting news programmes for a few months. This was not enough for the local government, which demanded that the owner sell his company. However, this confrontation be-

tween the regional government and *Trialeti* was soon defused, and the company continued to work as normal.

*Trialeti's* technical equipment consists of: nine computers, nine digital cameras, digital editing appliances, VCRs and monitors. They have a few well-equipped studios and their own programmes. The channel covers the whole of the Shida Kartli region and part of the Tskhinvali region, including Tskhinvali town. *Trialeti's* broadcasting license is valid until 2011. The company employs a staff of 60 people.

### ***Bulletin of the Information Centre of the Gori Local Government***

The Gori Information Centre was established in August 2003 with money provided by the Swiss *Agency for Development* and the *Eurasia Foundation*, and was founded in Gori as part of a network of analogous centres in other cities (Telavi, Signagi, Lagodekhi, Rustavi, Gori, Kutaisi, Zestaponi, Lanchkhuti, Ambrolauri).

The Centre's activities are focused on making public information available to citizens.

The bulletin publishes information about the meetings and activities of the local government, and provides information on a wide range of issues, including various utility tariffs.

The *Bulletin of the Information Centre* studies how deeply the public is interested in one or another problem by conducting social surveys; each subsequent edition of the bulletin is dedicated to the most important issue or issues identified by the survey. The bulletin is intended for non-governmental organisations, agencies of local government and ordinary citizens.

The Bulletin of the Information Centre is published once a fortnight, it consists of eight pages and is printed in A4 format. It is edited and designed locally, but is printed in Tbilisi. The Bulletin has a circulation of 1,000 copies, 800 of which are distributed to the public free of charge; the other 200 copies are delivered to government representatives and NGOs. Four people of the Information Centre are responsible for running the bulletin: a director, two technical assistants and an accountant.

## Kareli

### Newspaper *Karelis Moambe* (The Kareli Messenger)

This newspaper was published in 1939 as a body of the Kareli Regional Executive Committee of the Communist Party, and initially its name was *Karelis Kolmeurne*. It was later renamed *Oktombris Gzit*, but at the start of the 1990s its name became *Samreklo*. The newspaper was not published during the crisis in the 1990s. The newspaper was relaunched in May 2003 with the new name of *Karelis Moambe*.

The newspaper is owned by the local Gamgeoba and is published with its finances; in fact, *Karelis Moambe* was relaunched due to the efforts of the local government. The paper does not break with the traditions of old Soviet journalism and mostly publishes the publicistic materials. It also reports on the local government's activities. This information is provided to the newspaper by the Gamgeoba and Sakrebulo. The newspaper pays a lot of attention to famous people from Kareli, and also the district's sports and cultural life. Interested readers have the opportunity to ask their questions to legal and agricultural experts and get relevant answers from the newspaper.

As already mentioned, *Karelis Moambe* was relaunched on the initiative and with the financial assistance of the local Gamgeoba; correspondingly, the Gamgeoba requires the editorial board to ensure that the paper is of suitably high quality. In accordance with these demands, *Karelis Moambe* consists of eight colour pages, instead of four black-and-white ones. This of course increases expenses, but the amount of funding provided to the newspaper and its revenues have remained the same. There are very few advertisements in *Karelis Moambe*, and the money generated from commercial announcements is not enough to meet salary needs or ensure proper working conditions. Other than providing finances, the Gamgeoba has assisted *Karelis Moambe* only in collecting subscribers.

The newspaper does not have its own technical facilities. It is edited and designed at a private computer centre, but is then printed in Tbilisi. The newspaper is published once a week on A3 paper, and consists of eight pages. It has a circulation of 500 copies, 400 of which are distributed to subscribers, with a retail price of 40 tetri.

The newspaper employs a staff of five people: an editor, a deputy editor and three reporters.

## Kaspi

### Newspaper *Akhali Gantiadi*

This newspaper is heir to the newspaper of the Kaspi District Executive Committee of the Communist Party. It was initially called *Komunizmisaken*. At the start of the 1990s, the paper was renamed *Gantiadi*. It was not published during the crisis period. Since then it has begun publication again, on the initiative of the Gamgeoba and the editorial staff, but now its name is *Akhali Gantiadi*.

The newspaper is published by and belongs to the local Gamgeoba. Its contents are not very diverse, and mostly it just reports the activities of the local government. The paper publishes the decrees and resolutions of the Gamgeoba and Sakrebulo and summarised reports on their meetings. Although the newspaper is very cautious in its relationship with the government, it does not avoid problematic local issues and publishes articles on the environmental situation in the district, particularly on water and air contamination and its consequences for public health. The paper's staff are worried that they have no access to statistical data concerning public health. *Akhali Gantiadi* cooperates with various non-governmental organisations, and mainly it limits itself to reporting the opinions of environmental experts. The paper also cooperates actively with a women's rights organisation Adgilis Deda, publishes articles on women's rights and highlights the organisation's activities. *Akhali Gantiadi* also writes about religious issues and the life of the local eparchy, publishes materials about Orthodox celebrations, about architectural monuments and the history of the district.

The newspaper does not have its own technical equipment. It is edited and designed with local Gamgeoba's resources. It is printed in Tbilisi on A3 paper, consists of four pages and is published once a week with a circulation of 500 copies. Its retail price is 20 tetri.

*Akhali Gantiadi* employs four people: an editor, a deputy editor, an accountant and a journalist.

## Khashuri

### Newspaper *Khashuris Moambe* (The Khashuri Messenger)

This newspaper was founded in 1931 as the paper of the Khashuri District Executive Committee of the Communist Party and it was first called

*Stalinis Sakviri*; since then it has been published under the names *Bolshevikuri Sitkva*, *Gamarjvebis Gza* and *Alioni*.

The newspaper is now a limited company which was founded by a group of journalists. Despite this, it is unable to exist independently on its own finances, and collaborates closely with the local government. According to an agreement between *Khashuris Moambe* and the local government, the newspaper will highlight the latter's activities, in return for which most of its revenue is generated by the Gamgeoba.

The newspaper is not noted for its diverse contents or active civil position. Its lack of criticism towards the government is evident. None of the news that is published contains any analysis. It focuses on the local government's activities, printing the decrees and resolutions of the Gamgeoba and Sakrebulo, and providing information about meetings and workshops and what was discussed there. The newspaper also publishes articles dedicated to religious celebrations and historical dates, articles reflecting the history of the district and publications dedicated to famous people from Khashuri. Agricultural, cultural and medical issues are dealt with on separate pages.

The newspaper's technical equipment consists of the following: two computers purchased with the help of the Gamgeoba, a scanner, a printer and a dictaphone. *Khashuris Moambe* is edited and designed locally, but is then printed in Tbilisi on A3 paper. The number of pages ranges from four to 12, the newspaper has a circulation of about 500 copies, and its retail price is 20-50 tetri, depending on the number of pages.

*Khashuris Moambe* has a staff of seven people: an editor, a deputy editor, two heads of department, a cameraman, a proof-reader and a cleaner.

### ***Dia* Television Company**

This television company was founded in 1990 as the Khashuri branch of *Ibervizia*. Later, when the Tbilisi-based television company stopped broadcasting, the channel was established as an independent media organisation with the name *Dia*. Its founders are two private individuals with a share of 51%, and the Gamgeoba of Khashuri district, which holds the other 49%.

Initially, the Gamgeoba played no role in *Dia*'s establishment, but in 1994 the company's founders had financial problems and had to borrow money from the Khashuri branch of the National Bank. In exchange for this

service, the Gamgeoba demanded that it should play a role in *Dia*'s operation, a right which it did not have before.

*Dia* has very limited broadcasting and occupies only two hours of airtime. The rest of its airtime is used to broadcast programmes from *Rustavi 2*, for which a special agreement is made. The business relationship with *Rustavi 2* does not include financial issues.

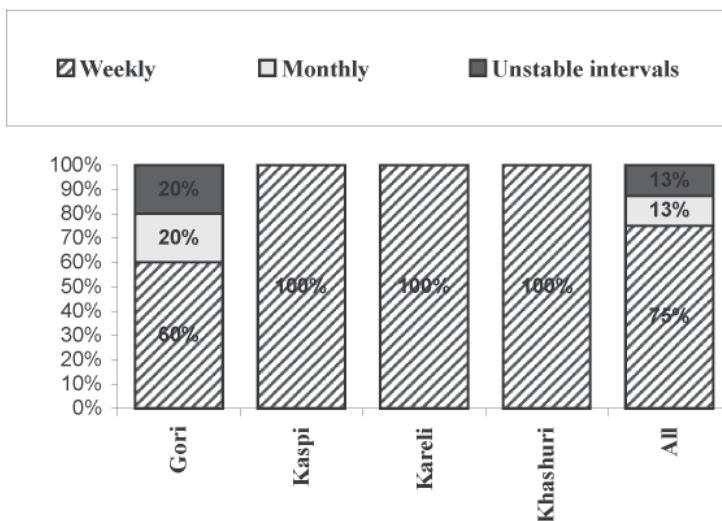
The Gamgeoba's involvement does not generate any revenue for the company. It can be said that the Gamgeoba has its own requirements towards the television channel, i.e. it wants it to report things the way the government wants. This creates tension between the government and the channel's founders. The company also has a problem because it cannot write proposals to win grants from international donor organisations. The only organisation that has a relationship with *Dia* is Internews, which regularly invites *Dia*'s reporters to trainings for journalists and also places orders for social advertisements with the company.

*Dia* fills up its two hours of airtime with a daily news update and the following programmes: *Literaturuli Khashuri*; a music and entertainment programme called 'Shesanishnavi Shvideuli', and an educational entertainment programme called 'What? Where? When?' A significant amount of time is used for commercial announcements, congratulations and obituaries.

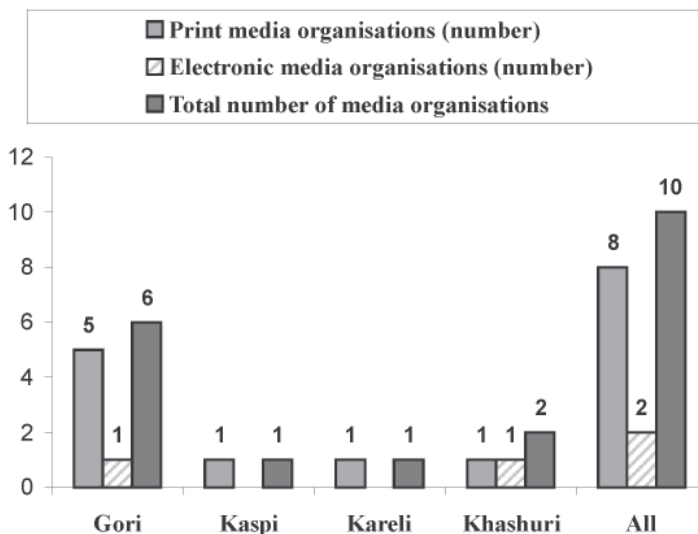
The television company has its own mast and transmitter, which can cover the Khashuri district. Its technical equipment consists of: three VHS-system camcorders, a digital camera, an editing computer and a computer for running subtitles.

*Dia* employs a staff of 15 people: a director, a deputy director for technical issues, an accountant, a cashier, a head of the information service, four journalists, a producer and an editing person.

### Publication intervals of print media organisations in Shida Kartli by district

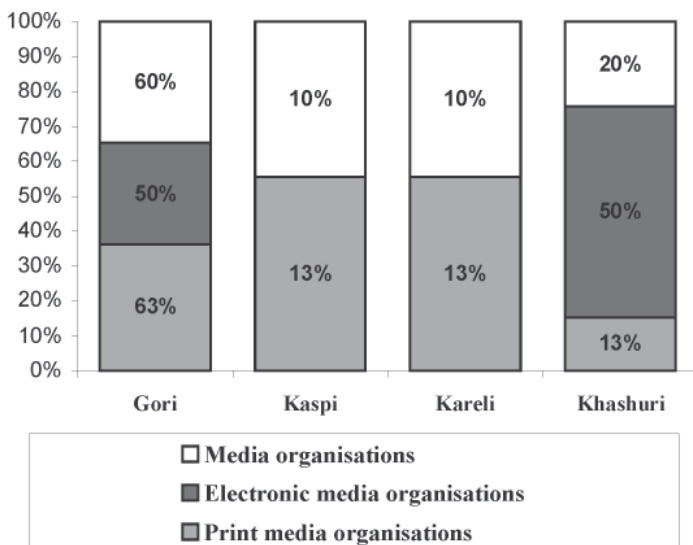


### Number of media organisations in Shida Kartli by district

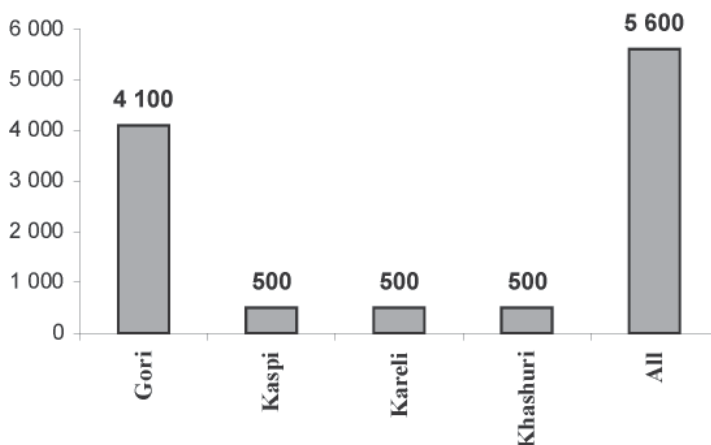




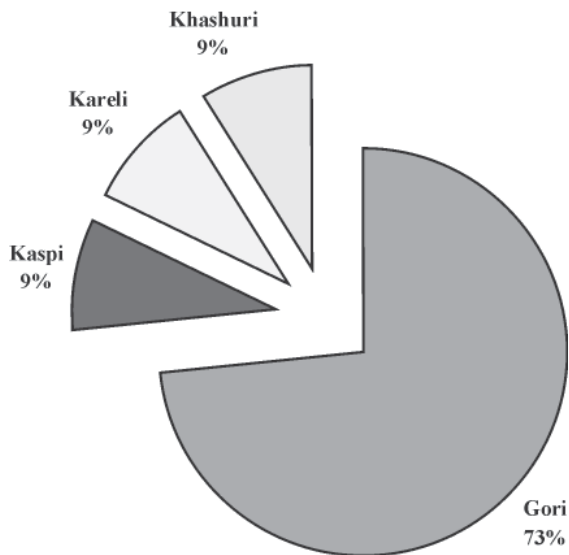
**Percentage distribution of media organisations  
in Shida Kartli by district**



**Overall circulation of print media  
in Shida Kartli by district**



**Pie chart showing overall circulation of print media  
in Shida Kartli by district**



# IMERETI<sup>1</sup>

The Imereti region makes up 9.2 % of Georgian territory and 16%<sup>2</sup> of Georgia's total population. Imereti's macroeconomic indicators, with a GDP index of 0.46, rank it in fifth place among Georgia's eleven regions.

## **The Specific Features of the Region and their Influence on Media Development**

The Imereti region is one of the largest and most densely populated parts of Georgia. Its economic infrastructure was established during the period in which the Soviet Union underwent mass industrialisation. Various branches of light and heavy industry, food processing and educational infrastructure were developed in the region alongside traditional agricultural industries. The region's main industrial centres used to be Kutaisi and Zestaponi; the towns of Tkibuli, Chiatura and Samtredia formed part of the mining and transport infrastructure of both Georgia and the Soviet Union; Tskaltubo, Khoni (previously called Tsulukidze in Soviet times), Vani, Bagdati (previously called Maiakovski in Soviet times), Terjola, Kharagauli, Sachkhere were agricultural districts; and Tskaltubo and Bagdati were important tourist centres with a developed health resort infrastructure. The agricultural sector in these districts was mainly engaged either in tea production and processing (Khoni, Tskaltubo) or winemaking (Terjola, Bagdati, Zestaponi, and Kharagauli). As well as these sectors, livestock and poultry breeding, crop farming and technical production were all developed in this region.

The local economic infrastructure was established on the basis of the Soviet economy, and the output of its heavy and light industry was intended to meet the requirements of the Soviet market. The collapse of the Soviet Union ruined the Imereti region's economic infrastructure. The majority of its old factories and plants no longer have any function, which plays a great role in shaping the economic policy of both the central government and the local administration, and also the general public's economic activity. On one hand, the abandoned buildings of non-functioning factories and plants, their Soviet-era material and technical resources, and the various irrigation or draining facilities that were left were a burden for the state because of

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<sup>1</sup> This study of the Imereti region was held on 7-19 November 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Results of the 2002 census, State Department of Statistics. Tbilisi 2002

the cost of maintaining them. On the other hand, they could have become a source of revenue if there had been any foreign investment or local capital. However, there is very little interest in this infrastructure. In such circumstances, these properties were very attractive for 'speculative' capital and state officials responsible for them. The majority of enterprises and other entities that were placed on the privatisation list or sold following non-transparent and dubious agreements with state representatives do not function, even in their specific profile. They are usually dismantled, and then ferrous and non-ferrous metals are sold as scrap metal, while iron and concrete constructions are sold as building materials. It is in this way that the owners make money from the property.

Not only the owners of privatised factories and plants, but also government-appointed directors of state-owned enterprises have been engaged in such economic activities for years. For thousands of people in Imereti, this process of stripping away an infrastructure that has been left without any function as the result of non-transparent deals between business people and local government representatives is the only way to survive.

The majority of people in the Imereti region are engaged in agriculture, though it can hardly be said that there are any large, profit-oriented farms. After the collapse of the Soviet collective farming system, people in Imereti's agricultural zone structured their economies around family farms that are more concerned with surviving than generating a profit. High population density, a lack of land, and the mountainous terrain create many obstacles to profitable agriculture.

These economic infrastructure problems in Imereti's towns and villages result in increasing internal and external migration. This has created two types of infrastructure underpinning the migration process: a one-way network (networks of individuals or organisations engaged in trafficking, and tourist companies), and shuttle migration (networks of individuals travelling between Georgia and neighbouring countries, selling local agricultural and light industry products abroad and trading foreign-made products in Georgia; also the means of organising these networks, such as markets and transport companies).

Only a very small part of the region's population, among them the local political-administrative and economic elite, have any degree of economic and social stability.

These conditions have a decisive impact on the development of the regional media. The aforementioned economic activities of the governmen-

tal and political elite are illegal and non-transparent. The local government and the business elite, which has close ties with the government, therefore regard a free media as a threat to their activities. Most of the public either thinks that the media is following the private interests of particular individuals or circles, or has no access to the media at all. Electronic media are more widely available, for which reason political and economic groups are particularly interested in them, and battle for control of them.

Despite these difficulties, there is some social potential within the Imereti region for the development of an independent media:

- The existence of competing groups within various economic spheres; in order to influence the government, or business groups with monopolistic tendencies, other groups need information resources and a public tribune;
- Almost the whole political spectrum of Georgia is represented in the Imereti region. All the large, influential parties have representatives in the region's main towns; they strive to control economic resources, and this is expressed in a struggle for political influence. In such a competitive environment they need ways to reach out to the public and also an information space free from the control of a particular political power;
- In order to adapt and orient their activities to current social and political realities, information on current events is of vital importance for civil society groups;
- In addition, the high level of civil sector development provides an important resource for the development of an independent media in the region;
- It is in this civil sector that problematic issues are discussed and ideas for solving them are formulated. There thus emerges a demand to broadcast to a larger audience and adequate information space.

### **Differences within the Region by Town**

There are 12 towns and district centres in the Imereti region, in which 37 media organisations are operating.

Kutaisi stands out for its number of media organisations; there are a total of 13 print and electronic media organisations<sup>3</sup>. As for other

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<sup>3</sup> Other than the 13 media organisations reviewed in this research, there are two more newspapers in Kutaisi: *Sarkmeli Sakartveloisi* and *Imeretis Moambe*, which are published irregularly and at long intervals.

towns, there are four media organisations each in Samtredia and Chiatura<sup>4</sup>; three media organisations each in Zestaponi and Tkibuli; two media organisations in each of the following towns: Vani, Bagdati, Kharagauli; and Khoni, Terjola, Sachkhere<sup>5</sup> and Tskaltubo each have one media organisation.

The number of private, state and other media organisations founded by the non-governmental sector is the following: 22 private, nine state, one semi-state/semi-private, and five founded by non-governmental organisations. In Kutaisi, there are nine private, one semi-private/semi-state, and three state organisations; there are two private, one state and one non-governmental organisation in Samtredia; Khoni has one private media organisation; Vani – one state and one non-governmental; Bagdati – one private and one state; Kharagauli – two private; Zestaponi – three private<sup>6</sup>; Tkibuli – two private and one state; Terjola – one state; Chiatura – two private, one state and one non-governmental; Sachkhere – one non-governmental; and Tskaltubo – one state media organisation.

The proportion between print and electronic media organisations is as follows: of 37 organisations in Imereti, 27 are print and 10 are electronic media. As can be seen, there is not much disproportion in Imereti between these two types of media; the electronic media makes up almost one third of all media organisations. The proportion of print and electronic media by town is as follow: nine print and four electronic media organisations in Kutaisi; three print and one electronic in Samtredia; one print and two electronic in Zestaponi; two print and one electronic in Tkibuli; three print and one electronic in Chiatura; one electronic media organisation in Khoni; two print organisations in Vani, Bagdati and Kharagauli each; and Sachkhere, Tskaltubo and Terjola are each represented by only one print media organisation.

In terms of the degree of media independence in different towns, Kutaisi,

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<sup>4</sup> In the case of Samtredia, this research does not contain information on the local television and radio company *Zari*, because the founder and director of this organisation refused to give an interview to *Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development* researchers.

<sup>5</sup> There is currently only one newspaper in Sachkhere, although *Mermisi*, the newspaper of the local division of the Youth Department was published here for years. The newspaper still exists legally, but it is no longer published due to financial problems.

<sup>6</sup> In Zestaponi *Argo TV*, *Radio Argo Plus* and the newspaper *Zestaponis Moambe* (*the Zestaponi Messenger*) all are owned by the same group; in this case, it is thus better to speak about the existence of a media holding.

the administrative centre, stands out. Kutaisi is a big city and civil society there is better developed. However, the size of the city and the scale of civil sector development cannot be regarded as a benchmark for measuring the degree of media independence: the second biggest town in Imereti is Zestaponi, where there is a lower degree of media independence than in Kharagauli and Khoni, which have a weak civil society.

## **Print Media**

As can be seen from the statistics above, there is a large number of print media organisations in the Imereti region; 27 newspapers are published, of which only eight belong to the state, while one is part-state/part-private. A large share of Imereti's newspapers are completely private or published by non-governmental organisations and civil groups, i.e. formally independent newspapers (18 newspapers), though very few of them are really independent. And here is the fundamental issue for the development of the print media in Imereti: why can formally independent newspapers not in fact be independent? There are many reasons for this:

- newspapers do not exist in a financial environment that would ensure their real independence:
  1. There is no advertising market in some districts, the influence of the local government or the private sector is so great that advertising is diverted to other publications, or the types of advertisements ordered may not be allowed to cooperate with one or another publication;
  2. District newspapers have low circulation and periodicity due to the public's low purchasing power; more often than not, this is because there is a low degree of trust in local newspapers and consequently low demand for them. Hence, the amount of money received from sales is very small;
  3. For existing newspapers, the budgetary resources of the local Gamgeobas are very tempting, which pushes them towards cooperating with the local government.
- Low level of civil society development:
  1. The majority of non-governmental organisations in Imereti's districts do not possess the relevant human resources to influence the local media so that the latter would adequately report on local problems;

2. The majority of local non-governmental organisations place more importance on preparing reports for international donors based in Tbilisi than on spreading this information to local society;
  3. Even in cases when civil society representatives cooperate with the local media as local experts, as a rule they place a higher priority on cooperating with the electronic media;
- The local government, and in many cases the staff of the print media themselves, follow the Soviet tradition of perceiving newspapers either as belonging to the town, or being its 'historian' or chronicle; with this attitude, any critical articles or alternative points of view are regarded as a deviation from this tradition;
  - The development of these newspapers is also hindered by ranging the problems as interesting and uninteresting news, like the Soviet tradition, and by the fact that the local government defines newspapers' contents.

Newspapers manage to overcome the above listed problems by taking part in the programmes of international donor organisations. With their support, they solve their financial problems and are able to overcome difficulties in their relationships with local governments.

The average periodicity of newspapers in the region is once a week, though in many cases it is once a fortnight, or more rarely, once a month. All they are supposed to come out at regular intervals, certain newspapers are often not published this regularly.

If we consider the amount and density of population in Imereti, these newspapers' circulation should be regarded as unsatisfactory. Only a few newspapers in Kutaisi have a high circulation: about 3,000 copies. The average circulation of newspapers in the region ranges from 500 to 800 copies; the minimum is 400.

In terms of material and technical resources, the majority of newspapers are forced to work in unsatisfactory conditions. However, newspapers can only be printed in Kutaisi. Some editors are not satisfied with the conditions offered by the local publishing house and prefer to print their newspapers in Tbilisi.

## **Electronic Media**

There are six television companies and four radio stations in Imereti. Of these, one television company and three radio stations are located in Kutaisi.



The electronic media has a much larger audience and is more easily accessible (if there are no power problems), and also it is cheap. For this reason, the Government and various interest groups all try to gain control over the electronic media.

The Government can gain control over the media in many ways: in some cases, television and radio companies may themselves have a desire to cooperate with the government because of its possible benefits. This is often used as a mechanism to control the electronic media. It is also possible to put pressure on the media or to abolish it by taking illegal actions. This took place in Kutaisi after the Rose Revolution. Before the Revolution, there were two television companies in Kutaisi: *Rioni* and *Kutaisi*. *Kutaisi* belonged to the local majoritarian MP, Bondo Shalikiani, and reflected his interests. After the Revolution, this MP failed to adjust to the new political situation, and his TV company started to irritate the government. Shalikiani was arrested and *Kutaisi* Television Company was shut down. The MP was told by the Government to hand over ownership of this media organisation to a National Movement activist who had no interest in the future of the TV company, which ceased operation. Neither the non-governmental sector in Kutaisi, nor governmental representatives, nor the company's old staff know who the new owner is. Nor is anything known about the television company's future; issues relating to its property are also undecided, but most of it has already been withdrawn from the building.

This scenario is not of course the normal pattern, and representatives of the free media have some defence mechanisms. The local media is influenced by the non-governmental sector and by international organisations, which protect the rights of the media and journalists to work and report on issues without being controlled by the government or particular political and economic groups.

Television and radio companies in the Imereti region are more worried about technical problems. They broadcast using outdated technical equipment which are below modern standards. TV companies do not have studios and resources to prepare their own programmes, so they have to broadcast programmes from Tbilisi-based channels, mostly from *Rustavi 2*. This is also true of Imereti's radio stations, which either broadcast programmes made by other radio stations or only broadcast music. The only exceptions in this regard are the Kutaisi radio stations *Dzveli Kalaki* (*Old City*) and *Kalakis Radio* (*City Radio*).

## **Media and Government**

The relationship between the media and the government in Imereti is generally constructive; the local government prefers to have a more moderate and loyal media, especially in the administrative centre of the region.

It should be emphasised that the scandalous information spread by the media about the governor of Imereti provoked a response not only within society, but also across the country and in higher government circles. It is hard to say whether the governor was replaced because of this media scandal or not, but this evidently served as a catalyst for personnel changes. In addition, articles about corruption in the City Hall made a great impact and were again followed by personnel changes: a journalist became the city mayor – the author of these articles. The media has no systematic influence over the government and in fact, its impact is limited. These events took place in Kutaisi, but it is hard to imagine something similar happening in other towns in Imereti, where the government has more resources to influence district newspapers, television and radio companies. Independent media organizations in Khoni and Kharagauli have often experienced similar attacks.

In some districts in Imereti, the local media easily find a common language with the government, and in fact although they are formally independent, they have turned into local government bodies. One reason for this, other than financial support, is that the heads of district newspapers were running these organisations when they were owned by the state and their editors expect their papers to fulfil the same functions as they did during the Soviet period.

## **Media and Society**

As mentioned above, society in the Imereti region is quite active and there is a demand for balanced, impartial information. However, differences can be observed according to geographic area. The media is less active in mountainous areas of Imereti, despite society's interest in it, because of a power deficit and the ruined communications system. People in these areas get information from the Tbilisi press and from the radio.

The following issues generate public interest and are reported on by the local media:

- Economic processes taking place in the region's towns;
- Public politics – and politics taking place behind closed doors;

- The actions of the local government, corruption, and the economic interests and activities of government representatives;
- An analysis of the social situation and daily problems, including crime and prostitution;
- The human rights situation in the police and prison system;
- Youth problems, drug-abuse, migration and its influence on the demographic situation.

These issues are problematic throughout the whole of Imereti, and the local media reports on them as much as possible, depending on their degree of independence.

Though the local media is open to a wide range of issues, there are certain topics that remain taboo, such as minority issues. There are no large, compact concentrations of ethnic minorities, and the region is basically monoethnic, so it is not a very problematic issue<sup>7</sup>; however, in some of the larger cities there are significant communities of religious minorities, which often face oppression. The media in Imereti does not talk much about the problems faced by non-Orthodox religious confessions<sup>8</sup>. If anything is written or said, it is done with a negative and aggressive tone.

## Kutaisi

### Newspaper *PS*

This newspaper was established in Autumn 1995 as one of the business activities of the private firm, Dizain Complex. In 1999, the paper's owners founded the limited company, Avtograpi for publishing and advertising activities, after which *PS* was separated from Dizain Complex Ltd. In May 2004, the newspaper was established as an independent limited company on the initiative of one of the founders of Avtograpi Ltd and *PS*'s editor.

Initially, the newspaper was not published on a stable basis and its frequency depended on the financial stability of Dizain Complex Ltd. Despite being published irregularly, *PS* gained the public's attention. During this period, the newspaper was published once a fortnight, or often once a month, and its circulation was limited, but some of the articles the paper

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<sup>7</sup> There are Meskhetian Turk communities in some Imereti villages, though as a rule the media never speaks about them. The exception is the Khoni television company *Mega TV*, which prepared a big programme on their life.

<sup>8</sup> Radio station *Dzveli Kalaki* is an exception to this rule.

published were so interesting to its readers that the editors published the same article in several issues. The readers were particularly interested in economic crime in the region and also articles on the crime situation.

*PS* has been published regularly with a stable circulation since 1999. It was one of the founders of the Imereti Regional Media Association, and within the framework of this organisation it has received grants from international donor organisations IREX and Eurasia Foundation on many occasions. The newspaper receives various types of assistance aimed at improving its contents, strengthening its editorial and managerial competences and upgrading its technical resources.

The newspaper mainly writes about the local social and civil-political situation. It has quite a severe working style and takes a strong civil position. *PS* shows particular interest in the activities of the local government and its representatives. They regularly publish documents revealing what property is owned by various officials, and monitor changes to the situation. The paper's editorial board follows all norms defined by the current law on public information, and claims against it made by public officials have never been proved in court. Other than these issues, the newspaper also writes about the social situation in the region and observes the activities implemented by the local government in this regard. *PS* has highlighted many discrepancies in this field.

The local government's attitude towards *PS* has not been benevolent. Temur Shashiashvili, the then Governor of Imereti, made insulting comments about the paper's staff on a local television channel because the newspaper published an article about discrepancies in the Bagrati Revival Foundation. In addition, the head of the regional police department, Ruben Asanidze, reacted in a way that included insults and threats because an article published in *PS* described his personal property. *PS*'s critical position towards the government and the government's unpleasant attitude towards *PS* resulted in supportive readers and a high demand for its publication. *PS* maintained the same critical attitude towards the government even after the Revolution. Similarly, the attitude of higher local government officials towards the newspaper has not changed either. A whole series of articles about the property and past activities of David Mumladze, the Governor of Imereti, laid the foundation for a long-term confrontation with the local government.

Before the Revolution, the local government did not attempt to respond to these accusations either by lodging a libel case through the courts, or by

denying articles published in *PS* about the financial machinations of the governor of Imereti. Instead, they decided to use indirect channels of influence to cut its main revenue sources and suppress it economically. A resolution of the district administration prohibited transport routes followed by minivans owned by *PS*'s founder. On one hand, this step could not be directly connected to the newspaper's activities; on the other hand, it would pose a serious threat to the paper's economic stability. The formal ground for this attack on *PS* was that the minibus permit had been issued illegally by the previous government. The founder of the newspaper brought the case to the court and simultaneously initiated a publicity campaign declaring that the government's actions were aimed at oppressing the newspaper. Thanks to the fact that the governor was transferred to another position in Tbilisi soon after, the confrontation between the government and the newspaper ended in the latter's favour without a trial being held.

Most of its revenues are generated from Avtograpi Ltd and the transport infrastructure owned by the newspaper's founder. The money received from sales and advertisements is only enough to cover the paper's technical expenses and does not cover the salaries of its staff and journalists.

The paper's technical resources of the newspaper are upgraded regularly, and currently *PS* is very well equipped. It has six computers, a scanner, three printers, two digital cameras, a photocopy machine and nine dictaphones.

*PS* is edited, designed and printed in Kutaisi on A3 format paper; it contains 16 pages and has a circulation of 3,000 copies. It is published once a week. Two thirds of its print run are distributed to subscribers, and the rest is for retail sale. *PS* costs 30 tetri.

The newspaper has a staff of 22 people: a director, a deputy director, an editor, a manager for public relations and newspaper distribution, an office manager, two designers, a computer network administrator, seven journalists, a photo-reporter and five correspondents in the Khoni, Vani, Zestaponi, Bagdati and Tskaltubo districts.

## **Newspaper *Résumé***

This newspaper was established in 1997. One of its founders is also the founder of a private school called Imedi in Kutaisi, and the independent newspaper started to publish using the school's material, technical and human resources. Initially, the local administration helped to establish

*Résumé*, but later there was a disagreement between the founders. After this, the newspaper was forced to leave the administration building and the government returned its share to the newspaper.

In the first stage of its existence, the newspaper was published as a so-called ‘information paper’ and did not come out regularly. It published small articles about events taking place in the city and was mainly focused on the problems in education. Later, the newspaper’s size and its sphere of interests grew, and it started to actively report on political, economic and social events. The paper also started to cover events taking place outside Kutaisi, for which it hired correspondents in certain districts of Imereti. Although the local city hall helped to establish it, the newspaper developed a critical way of working and published articles about the problems in district administration and the economic activities of certain government representatives.

*Résumé* has various interests: it informs its readers not only about cases of corruption and a lack of transparency in the local government, but also about the social and economic situation of the people in the villages, the difficult situation in healthcare and education, youth problems in the region, labour migration and human rights. The newspaper discusses these issues in rubrics that have already become traditional. Furthermore, *Résumé* has started to provide free legal consultation to its readers, devoting a separate page for this purpose. Most of its revenues are received from subscribers, commercial announcements (obituaries and congratulations) and sales. However, this money is not enough for the paper to operate fully, upgrade its material and technical resources or pay its journalists. The owner thus provides support to the newspaper using revenues received from the private school. *Résumé* has never received any grants from international organisations or donors, which is reflected in its poor technical resources and the qualifications of its journalists.

*Résumé*’s technical equipment consists of two computers, a dictaphone and a camera. It is edited and designed in Kutaisi, but is printed then in Tbilisi on A3 paper with a circulation of 2,000-3,000 copies. The newspaper consists of 16 pages and is published once a week. Half of its print run is distributed to subscribers; the other half goes on sale with a retail price of 40 tetri.

*Résumé* employs a staff of 11 people: an editor, six journalists (four of which work in various districts of Imereti), two proof-readers, an editor/designer, and a photo correspondent.

## Newspaper *Akhali Gazeti* (The New Newspaper)

This newspaper was established in July 2001 by a private individual and was soon registered as a limited company. *Akhali Gazeti*'s founders intended to establish a powerful, independent civil-political newspaper in the Imereti region, and to some extent they have succeeded.

Unlike other independent publications, *Akhali Gazeti* was established somewhat later; it was thus hard for it to find its place within the existing media space. Readers were accustomed to local publications that had been established earlier, and furthermore, in the reviving political atmosphere during this period, every new media organisation was considered to be defending a particular political power. Because the word *Akhali* means 'new', *Akhali Gazeti* was associated with the political party *Akhali Memarjveneebi* (*New Rights*). The newspaper had to work hard to assure readers of its impartiality. Readers in Imereti's larger towns now know the newspaper quite well, and it has gained much trust among society.

In the first stage of its existence, the paper had no strategic development plan; it also had financial difficulties and survived for two years only thanks to the enthusiasm of its journalistic staff. Its further development was made possible by its relationship with international donor organisations. The fact that qualified and experienced journalists started to work for the newspaper was *Akhali Gazeti*'s first 'investment'. The production of a well-selected and united team of journalists that was impartial and followed the norms of journalistic ethics in a fundamental and coherent way made the newspaper attractive for cooperation to international donor organizations. Since its establishment, *Akhali Gazeti* has collaborated successfully with IREX, the Open Society – Georgia Foundation, the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, and the *Eurasia Foundation*. This cooperation has not only brought financial assistance to the newspaper, but has also provided for organisational and professional development.

During its cooperation with international organisations, *Akhali Gazeti* became an influential newspaper and its articles have often provoked a severe reaction from the local administration, political or business groups. The newspaper has had a hard relationship with the Governor's office, local departments of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and local businessmen both before and after the Rose Revolution. Several cases against it were brought to court and there were cases of threats and insults and attempts to offer

bribes, but the newspaper did not change its working style and still reports on the activities of the local government and business people.

The newspaper is interested in issues relating to transparency in governmental structures and highlights problems related to corruption. Its attention is focused on the hard social, criminal and environmental situation in the region and the violation of human rights. Through its correspondent networks, information is quickly collected about events taking place in various districts and analytical articles are prepared about problematic issues. *Akhali Gazeti*'s editors study public opinion to identify such problems and plan the contents of the next issue accordingly.

*Akhali Gazeti* actively cooperates with the non-governmental sector in Imereti; in particular, it has close ties with representatives of the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association and the Liberty Institute, from which it receives not only valuable information but also legal and moral support. Non-governmental organisations also find it valuable to cooperate with the newspaper, from which they regularly get information on particular cases of human rights abuse beyond the region's administrative centre.

The paper generates most of its revenues from advertisements and commercial announcements but this is not sufficient for it to function properly. Grants from international organizations are important to the newspaper. When this research was done, the newspaper was receiving a grant from the European Commission within the framework of a cooperative project with the Institute for War and Peace Reporting which enables the newspaper not only to cover publishing expenses, but also salaries and royalties. On the basis of this grant, the newspaper has updated its technical resources by acquiring two computers, a power generator, dictaphones and a digital camera. A driver was hired to help the journalists work efficiently, and all transportation expenses are covered.

*Akhali Gazeti*'s technical resources now consist of three computers, two printers, six dictaphones, a digital camera and a power generator.

*Akhali Gazeti* is edited and designed in Kutaisi, but it is then printed in Tbilisi. It consists of 12 pages and is published once a week on A3 format paper. It has a circulation of 700 copies; 550 are distributed to subscribers and the other 150 are sold at retail.

*Akhali Gazeti* has a staff of 25 people, 15 of which are journalists (among them are correspondents in Tskaltubo, Zestaponi, Khoni, Terjola, Sachkhere, Samtredia districts); the rest of its personnel are in charge of various technical and administrative issues.



## Newspaper *Chemi Kutaisi* (My Kutaisi)

This newspaper was established in September 2003 on the basis of the newspaper *Akhali Kutaisi* by a resolution of the Kutaisi Sakrebulo. It is a limited company which is 100% owned by the government.

Initially, the newspaper focused on highlighting legal and administrative issues. Though *Chemi Kutaisi* received stable funding from the local government, being limited only to this narrow sphere was not profitable. The newspaper had few readers. Its only regular consumers were the staff of the district Sakrebulo. After the Revolution, the local government reduced the finances allocated for the newspaper, which meant that the newspaper had to find its own audience. The first step in this direction was taken in June 2004, when the editorial board started to report on social, political, economic and cultural issues. The newspaper kept reporting on legal and administrative issues; each new issue of *Chemi Kutaisi* is accompanied by an appendix where such materials are published.

As mentioned, the newspaper existed with the finances provided by the government. Initially, the Kutaisi Sakrebulo allocated 92,000 laris to publish *Chemi Kutaisi*, and the newspaper was printed in colour on enamel paper. After the Rose Revolution, this financial assistance was almost halved, so the paper's editors decided not to spend money on expensive printing. According to a resolution of the Sakrebulo, the *Chemi Kutaisi*'s editorial board should cover one-third of its publication expenses with money received from sales and advertisements. The newspaper finds it hard to meet this requirement because sales are low and there are few advertisements. *Chemi Kutaisi* is edited, designed and printed in Kutaisi on A3 format paper. It consists of 16 pages. The appendix is printed on A4 paper and its size varies. The newspaper is published once a week and has a circulation of 1,000 copies. Half of its print run is distributed to subscribers; the other half is sold with a retail price of 50 tetri. As a rule, sales are very low, and copies that are not sold are distributed to Sakrebulo free of charge.

*Chemi Kutaisi* has the following technical resources: two computers, a scanner, a printer and a dictaphone.

The newspaper employs a staff of 18 people: a chief editor, a deputy editor, a technical editor, a commercial manager, a specialist in technical issues, a system administrator, a proof-reader, and a specialist in printing issues, an accountant, six journalists, two photo reporters and a cleaner.

## **Newspaper *Saghamos Kutaisi* (The Evening Kutaisi)**

This newspaper was established in February 1999. It is a limited company and it was founded by a collective of journalists and *Gantiadi*, the magazine of the Kutaisi branch of the Writers Union of Georgia.

The newspaper's interests are very far from politics and are mainly limited to cultural issues. *Saghamos Kutaisi* has poetry, arts, architecture and music pages. *Saghamos Kutaisi* tries to inform the public about the creative works of famous Georgian artists, especially those who live in Kutaisi, and to popularise their creative works. The newspaper often writes about the problems faced by the Kutaisi cultural establishment – the vulnerable condition of musical, drawing and choreography schools, the distortion of the architectural image of the city, problems faced by museums, etc. The newspaper does not avoid criticising the government on these issues.

*Saghamos Kutaisi* also highlights social topics such as youth problems, unemployment and migration. Particular interest in these issues was generated by a series of letters written by young people who had emigrated from Kutaisi.

*Saghamos Kutaisi* often writes about religious issues. It publishes letters from representatives of the Orthodox Church about the Orthodox Church of Georgia. There are also articles dedicated to other Christian confessions, though as a rule they are aggressive and insulting. So far, no religious minorities have published an article in *Saghamos Kutaisi*.

*Saghamos Kutaisi* has very few technical resources: four dictaphones and two cameras. It is edited, designed and printed in Kutaisi on A4 paper. The number of pages ranges from 16 to 20, and the retail price, correspondingly, is 40-60 tetri. The newspaper is published once a fortnight and has a circulation of 800 copies. It is distributed by private distributors and the Sakpress network.

The newspaper employs a staff of six people: an editor, a deputy editor, two journalists, a proof-reader and a photo reporter.

## **Newspaper *Kutaisi***

This newspaper is the heir of a periodical founded by the Kutaisi Executive Committee of the Communist Party in 1921. Initially, its name was *Musha and Glekhi* (The Worker and the Peasant), but then it was published under the title *Leninis Gzit* (Lenin's Way). Later its name became

*Stalineli*, but it was then changed again to *Kutaisi*. The newspaper became independent in 1990. It is currently a limited company and its founder is the non-governmental organisation, Journalists Union.

Since independence, *Kutaisi*'s editorial board has been involved in a dispute with the local government over its building, which was built during the Soviet period. Before 2000, the paper's editorial board was located in a building in the city centre, which now houses the limited company Press House, which was founded by the government. This company leases this space and gives a significant amount of money to the local budget. When the newspaper lost its building, the editorial board was ready to transfer into government ownership to keep the building, but the city government had no interest in the newspaper. Because of this prolonged dispute, *Kutaisi* faces serious financial problems and its activity has been reduced to dealing with these problems. Regardless of this, the newspaper still manages to be published, although its contents are of very low quality and reflect the confrontation in which it is involved. Its contents are similar to other district newspapers: it publishes articles about the activities of the local government, biographical data of famous people from the city and essayistic articles about the city's historical and cultural heritage.

*Kutaisi*'s revenue is generated from a small number of commercial announcements. The editorial board therefore looks to sponsors for assistance. Often the sponsor is the local city hall. One of its revenue sources is money collected from subscribers found with the help of the city administration.

The newspaper does not have its own technical equipment and is designed in a computer centre in the city, but it is then printed in the local publishing house. *Kutaisi* is printed on A3 paper, consists of four pages and has a circulation of 500 copies. It is published once a week with a retail price of 30 tetri.

*Kutaisi* employs a staff of nine people: an editor, a responsible editor, a technical editor, a proof-reader, a typist, an accountant, a cleaner and two journalists.

### **Newspaper *Samartali Imeretshi* (Justice in Imereti)**

This newspaper was founded in April 2004 by a private individual.

*Samartali Imeretshi* is experiencing serious financial problems. There is very little awareness of its existence, and thus it also has very low demand.

Obviously, orders for commercial advertisements are also very rare. The paper is published using the founder's private finances and contributions from friends. A small amount of revenue is generated from the so-called 'commercial page', a paid service in which articles or interviews are published with business people and lawyers working in the city.

The newspaper is interested in the situation in the field of law, in cases where police officers have exceeded their rights, and in human rights violations in prisons. In this regard, the paper cooperates actively with human rights organisations in various towns in Imereti, and prepares analytical articles based on the information it receives from them.

At one stage, *Samartali Imeretshi* made law-enforcement bodies subscribe to the newspaper. This relationship soon ended, however; the paper's critical tone and its reports that law enforcement officers were breaking the law were not in the interests of the Ministry of Internal Affairs or local departments of the Prosecutor's Office.

Though the law-enforcement agencies do not have a very warm attitude towards the newspaper, there have been cases when material published by *Samartali Imeretshi* met with a positive reaction. Police officers in various towns in the region were warned by their supervising body due to articles published in the newspaper, and in the Kutaisi Prosecutor's Office an investigation was begun about cases where officials had been exceeding their rights or extorting money.

The newspaper does not have its own technical resources. It is edited, designed and printed at one of Kutaisi's private publishing houses.

The newspaper is printed on A3 paper; it consists of eight pages and has a print run of 1,000. It is not published on a stable basis and has 300 subscribers. The retail price is 30 tetri.

The newspaper employs three people on a permanent basis: an editor, a deputy editor and a journalist. The newspaper also employs two journalists on a contractual basis.

### **Newspaper *Kutaisuri Versia* (The Version of Kutaisi)**

This newspaper was established in 2004 as a branch of the Tbilisi newspaper *Akhali Versia* (The New Version) when it widened its media business to reach Batumi and Kutaisi. Due to financial problems, *Akhali Versia* had to shut down its branch in Batumi, but not in Kutaisi, since *Kutaisuri Versia* is now operating successfully.

*Kutaisuri Versia*'s main focus is investigative journalism, not only on criminal cases but also on the local government's activities. The newspaper cooperates closely with non-governmental organisations in Kutaisi, from which it gets information about events and processes taking place in the regional and district administrations, and also finds out about problems caused by criminal economic activities.

*Kutaisuri Versia*'s readers are very interested in the newspaper, and as its sales ratings indicate, demand for the newspaper is increasing. Readers like its style, and articles are presented in an interesting way. Publishing such material ensures *Kutaisuri Versia* high sales and suitable dividends. Thus, for example, the whole print run of the issue containing an article about shared economic interests between crime lords and government representatives in Kutaisi sold out. Readers were also very interested in a journalistic investigation into the whole infrastructure around prostitution on the transit road passing through Imereti.

Though the paper's editors do their best to get complete information on the issues they are interested in, there are cases when the journalists themselves refuse to work on certain issues. Thus, for example, the journalist who wrote the article about a business deal between a crime lord and a government representative refused to continue working on this topic, without giving a reason. It is clear that the journalist was put under pressure.

Good sales do not solve all the paper's financial problems, and its existence still depends on finances provided by *Akhali Versia*. There are very few orders for advertisements. Nor has the paper yet received grants from any international organisations. It could achieve financial independence and stability if it could increase its circulation and number of subscribers.

*Kutaisuri Versia*'s technical equipment consists of two computers and three dictaphones. It is edited, designed and printed in Tbilisi. *Kutaisuri Versia* is printed on A3 format paper, consists of 16 pages and is published once a week. The newspaper has the circulation of 1,000 copies and its retail price is 20 tetri, though it is normally sold at news-stands for 30 or 40 tetri, proving that it is in high demand.

*Kutaisuri Versia* employs a staff of six people: an editor and five journalists.

### **Newspaper *Ukimerioni***

This newspaper was established in 1998 by the Kutaisi branch of the Writers Union of Georgia and is owned by the state.

*Ukimerioni* is a literary newspaper and writes about literature and arts. However, at times the paper has actively engaged in civil polemics on religious issues. *Ukimerioni* defends Orthodox principles and its aggressive attitude towards other non-Christian confessions.

Before the Rose Revolution, the newspaper used to receive a stable subsidy from the Government. After the Writers Union's funding was cut, the newspaper switched to programmatic funding. The newspaper does not publish any advertisements or other commercial announcements.

*Ukimerioni* does not have its own technical resources. It is edited, designed and printed at one of Kutaisi's publishing houses. It is printed on A3 paper, its length ranges from 16 to 26 pages, and it is published on an unstable basis. It is distributed free of charge.

The newspaper employs a staff of four people: an editor, a deputy editor, an executive editor and a proof-reader. Articles are provided by members of the Writers Union and local scholars.

### ***Rioni* Television Company**

This television company was founded in Kutaisi in 1986 as the first studio for documentary films. In 1988, it became a cable channel and a commercial outfit. It already had 5,000 subscribers by then, which enabled the company to collect enough money to establish a broadcasting company. *Rioni* is currently a limited company and belongs to one person.

*Rioni* developed a civil-political orientation and reported on events and processes in the region as much as it could. This was not in contradiction to the local government's information policy and it had close cooperation with the Government rather than real independence. This relationship was based not only on financial benefit, but also the personal relationship between the company's founder and Temur Shashiashvili, the then governor of Imereti. This was a great help to the company's founder when he was trying to establish the channel during the Soviet period, when Shashiashvili was the secretary of the City Executive Committee of the Communist Party.

Economically, the company was greatly dependent on the benevolence of the local government to function. Most of its news programmes were dedicated to highlighting the activities of the local government and running interviews with its representatives. There were also live broadcasts from district administration sessions and a programme, 'The governor is listening

to you', where the governor of Imereti answered citizens' phone calls live on air. Naturally, the Imereti regional administration paid for this service. Election periods were particularly profitable, when the local government favoured *Rioni* at the expense of *Kutaisi* television company, which was seen to be in opposition to the Government.

After the Rose Revolution, the relationship between *Rioni* and the regional administration changed significantly. The company moved out of its government-owned building and into its own premises; government funding also decreased significantly. One reason for this was the fact that *Kutaisi* TV Company, which belonged to Bondo Shalikiani, an MP who was arrested after the Revolution, was shut down; after that, *Rioni* lost its importance as a way to refute attacks from the opposition. Moreover, the new government has a very different working style. *Rioni* still represents an important resource for the local government when conducting various campaigns.

The television company's air network is mostly filled by broadcasting movies and music videos, though it also has its own programmes. The channel begins its broadcasting with a morning entertainment programme. There are news programmes three times a day: at 16:30, 20:30 and 22:30. During the day, there are three different music programmes, and the company also prepares two educational programmes: 'Conversations with a Priest' and 'A Conversation about Literature'.

Its news programmes mostly report on Kutaisi, though the channel also pays a lot of attention to events in other districts in the region. *Rioni* has its reporting bureaus in Samtredia, Vani, Bagdati and Tskaltubo. In many cases, it adds significant amounts of its own commentary to its news reports, which are therefore not balanced.

The television company cooperates closely with the Patriarch's office of the Georgian Orthodox Church, and not only for the programme 'Conversation with a Priest'. The company also has a radio frequency, which is used for the Patriarchate's radio station and is broadcast throughout various parts of western Georgia.

As well as the Patriarch's office, *Rioni* also cooperates with various organisations in Kutaisi, and civil society representatives who participate in programmes and talk shows on problematic public and political issues. In this regard, the channel cooperates with the Georgian Young Economists' Association, the Liberty Institute and the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association.

*Rioni* does not have much experience of working with donor organisations. The only grant it has received was provided by the Eurasia Foundation to upgrade its technical resources. Furthermore, *Rioni* often attends trainings for journalists arranged by Internews. The fact that the television company has never received substantial assistance from international organisations for its organisational and journalistic development, clearly affects the quality of its work and the level of qualification of its journalists.

The television company's technical equipment was seriously damaged by a fire in its offices in 2004. Currently, only a very small part of the technical resources it possesses are operational. *Rioni* broadcasts its programmes with its own transmitter and has a broadcasting license until 2014.

The company employs a staff of 42 people; 15 of these work in the news department.

### **Radio *Dzveli Kalaki* (The Old City)**

This radio station was founded in December 1995 by four private individuals with equal shares of 25% each. Radio *Dzveli Kalaki* is registered as a limited company.

*Dzveli Kalaki* is an information-entertainment radio station and its main audience is young people. However, it does not avoid public and political issues and has developed into one of the strongest information services in Kutaisi, and throughout the Imereti region in general. *Dzveli Kalaki* broadcasts its own 5-10 minute news updates 12 times a day, once every hour. An analytical programme, 'Dghis Bolos', is broadcast at 22:00. The radio station also broadcasts programmes from Radio *Tavisupleba* (Radio Liberty) every morning and evening. Once a week, *Dzveli Kalaki* broadcasts a programme prepared within the framework of a coalition project implemented by Radio *Tavisupleba*, whose other participants, apart from *Dzveli Kalaki*, are Radio *Harmonia* (Poti), Radio *Atinati* (Zugdidi), Radio *Mtsvane Talgha* (Green Wave) – *Meskheta* (Akhaltsikhe) and Radio *Hereti* (Lagodekhi).

*Dzveli Kalaki*'s editorial policy is to provide its audience with balanced news and analytical reports, which sometimes causes dissatisfaction among the local government and some civil groups, and can also lead to pressure from them. Government dissatisfaction becomes more active especially



during elections, but with civil groups there is no particular time that it is worse; rather, they react negatively towards the radio station whenever it reports on various issues. In particular, the station comes under pressure immediately after it reports on religious problems that exist in the region. The peak of such civil attacks against *Dzveli Kalaki* started in January 2003 and lasted for seven months. This happened right after a series of programmes in which the radio reported on the cultural life of Kutaisi's Catholic community. The programmes prepared by the radio station did not focus on getting familiar with Catholicism or preaching the Catholic religion. In fact, the programme referred to famous people in civil and cultural affairs who came from the Kutaisi Catholic community. Despite this, local orthodox believers were indignant that *Dzveli Kalaki* showed interest in this issue and attacked the radio station's office on several occasions. In addition, the radio was taken to court. One of the issues discussed in court concerned the harmful effects of the radio-transmitting tower on the health of people living in nearby areas. According to the court's verdict, the station should have dismantled the tower and transmitter which were located on top of the building. This would of course have meant that the radio station would stop functioning. This verdict seemed to be a revenge by Orthodox Christians who sued the station in court.

This long-term attack against *Dzveli Kalaki* created the foundations for Kutaisi's non-governmental sector, local government and political parties to work together and establish coalitions. The City Hall, opposing parties, and the government party, the Citizens' Union of Georgia, all promised to support *Dzveli Kalaki* in exchange for certain compromises and cooperation. Accepting assistance from the political powers would have meant a reduction in *Dzveli Kalaki*'s independence, so the radio refused these offers, preferring to ally with the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, the Liberty Institute and the international organisations, IREX, the Open Society – Georgia Foundation and the Eurasia Foundation. Local students and some media representatives also actively tried to defend the radio station. For example, *Kutaisi* television company often reported on events concerning the station. Finally, thanks to the joint efforts of young people, civil society and various international organisations, the cases against *Dzveli Kalaki* were terminated and the constant attacks on the office came to an end.

In the course of its existence, *Dzveli Kalaki* has cooperated with IREX, the Open Society – Georgia Foundation, the Eurasia Foundation, the Embassy of the United States of America, and Internews, and has implemented

more than 10 joint projects with them. This cooperation has helped the radio station to constantly improve its material and technical resources, but also to upgrade the qualification and professionalism of its journalists. All of this has enabled the station to develop as a strong regional broadcasting company and a stable media organisation. The radio station broadcasts across the whole Imereti region, and in some parts of Samegrelo and Guria, which increases the interest of advertisers in placing orders.

Although *Dzveli Kalaki*'s technical equipment has been damaged because of the attacks, it still meets modern requirements and ensures that the station continues to operate properly. *Dzveli Kalaki* has a broadcasting license until 2014 and broadcasts its signal using its own mast.

The radio employs a staff of 14 people, including four journalists and four DJs.

### **Radio Iverioni**

This radio station was founded in 2003 by a private individual and is registered as a limited company.

*Iverioni* is a musical entertainment station, though it also broadcasts news releases 12 times a day – once an hour – and broadcasts information provided by the news agency *Interpress*. This news mainly refers to events going on throughout Georgia and rarely covers local matters, which indicates that the station does not have its own reporting network. Radio *Iverioni* has never come into conflict with the local government since it does not have any analytical programmes.

The radio station's main source of revenue is advertisements and money generated from people ordering music.

The station's technical equipment consists of three computers, an audio mixer and a power generator. *Iverioni* broadcasts across the whole of Imereti, except for the Tkibuli and Kharagauli districts. It has a broadcasting license until 1012.

*Iverioni* employs a staff of seven people: a director, an accountant, two news presenters and three presenters on its musical programmes.

### **Kutaisis Radio (Kutaisi Radio)**

This radio station was founded in 2003 with material, technical and human resources left over from the Soviet-era Georgia Central Radio Kutaisi Correspondent Unit. The founder of *Kutaisis Radio* was the Ministry of

Property Management of Georgia. The station belongs to the limited company Kutaisi Radio Office and is 100% state owned.

*Kutaisi Radio* broadcasts using the old cable system, and fails to cover the entire city because of the problems associated with renovating a network and system that have been abandoned for years. It has a very low audience, drawn mostly from socially vulnerable groups within the city.

The station's activities are intended to satisfy the informational needs of the older generation. *Kutaisi Radio* prepares its own analytical programmes on social and health issues. It broadcasts news updates three times a day, but they do not refer much to political problems. There is a programme, 'The Doctor advises us', where doctors provide free medical consultations to vulnerable patients live on air. *Kutaisi Radio* also has a programme providing its audience with free legal consultations.

There are programmes about the history of Georgia, the Orthodox religion, literature and arts, sports, and the lives of famous people.

As already mentioned, *Kutaisi Radio* is focused on meeting the interests of those who are particularly vulnerable. This defines its price policy. It is true that other than governmental financing, the radio also gets revenue from subscription fees of one lari per month; pensioners pay 50 tetri, but the disabled are exempt from payment.

*Kutaisi Radio's* technical equipment consists of old Soviet appliances; it also has a computer and a few dictaphones.

The radio employs a staff of 15 people, who work in the news, advertising and technical departments.

## **Samtredia**

### **Newspaper *Abreshumis Gza* (The Silk Road)**

This newspaper was founded in 2002 by the non-governmental organisation, Union Kidobani. It is not an independent legal entity and is not registered as a limited company.

Union Kidobani implements various activities and is focused on the development of the local mass media, tourism, sports and culture in the Samtredia district. Correspondingly, *Abreshumis Gza's* objective is to highlight the situation in these spheres.

The newspaper has traditional sections and pages about the Orthodox religion, family problems, the history of the district, and also consultations

with a psychologist and entertaining tests. *Abreshumis Gza* is actively involved in political events taking place in the Samtredia district. It is a popular media organisation in Samtredia; for this reason, local parties and civil groups turn to it to report on their programmes and their activities during elections. Pre-election advertising generates significant revenues for the newspaper and covers its publishing expenses for some time. Despite such cooperation with political parties, *Abreshumis Gza* is not considered to be a politically engaged newspaper and the local public has a lot of trust in it. Its most popular material concerned the budget relationships between the owner of the district's asphalt factory and the local government, which drew a large response. The mayor of Kutaisi had a share in the factory, and it was discovered that the factory's tax revenues were transferred to the Kutaisi budget rather than the Samtredia budget. Union Kidobani and representatives from the local media and civil groups initiated an information campaign on this issue and demanded that the local government responded appropriately. The problem was solved only once the said official left the government.

*Abreshumis Gza's* main source of revenue is money received from advertisements and sales, but this is not enough for it to exist on its own, so the *Union Kidobani* finances the newspaper from its budget. *Union Kidobani* itself is engaged in economic activity, and is the founder of a system in Samtredia for paying for home appliances in installments. Revenues received from this are designated for various activities, such as environmental work in the city and periodic cleaning activities, but also for *Abreshumis Gza*.

The newspaper's technical equipment was purchased by the Union Kidobani and consists of four computers, two printers, a scanner, a digital camera and three dictaphones.

*Abreshumis Gza* is edited and designed locally and is then printed in Tbilisi on A3 paper. It consists of 16 pages and is published once a week. It has a circulation of 1,200 copies and the retail price is 50 tetri.

The newspaper employs a staff of 11 people: an editor, a commercial manager, five journalists, a photo reporter, a painter and two computer specialists.

### **Newspaper *Samtrediis Matsne* (The Samtredia Messenger)**

This newspaper is the heir of a periodical founded by the Executive Committee of the Communist Party of the Samtredia District in 1930. Ini-

tially it was called *Sotsialisturi Sheteva* (The Socialist Attack), but its name was then changed to *Tsinsvla* (Moving Forward). After the Communist Party lost power and Georgia regained its independence, the newspaper became independent and was published under the name *Samtredia*. The newspaper temporarily stopped publishing during the chaos following the civil war. In 1993, it began publishing again with the help of funding from the local Gamgeoba; its form of ownership then changed and since then it has been published under the name *Samtrediis Matsne*. The newspaper is currently registered as a limited company and is owned by the Samtredia district Gamgeoba.

The newspaper's editorial policy is defined by the local government. It publishes articles about the activities of the local government, religion, lives of famous people from Samtredia, and agricultural issues. Sometimes the newspaper also highlights social problems.

The newspaper exists thanks to funding from the local budget and gets 15,000 laris a year. Of course, this money is not enough for it to survive properly.

*Samtrediis Matsne* technical facilities consist of a computer, a printer, two dictaphones and a camera. It is edited and designed in Samtredia, but is then printed in Tbilisi on A3 paper. The newspaper has eight pages and is published once a fortnight with a circulation of 500 copies. Part of its print run is distributed to subscribers – employees of the local government and other structures – the rest goes on sale with a retail price of 40 tetri.

*Samtrediis Matsne* has a staff of six people: an editor, an executive secretary, a journalist, a photo reporter, an accountant and a computer specialist.

### **Newspaper *Mzera* (The Gaze)**

This newspaper has been published since 2002. It was founded by a private individual and is a limited company.

In 2003, it was not published for a while due to financial problems, but it started again in 2004 thanks to financial assistance from a local businessperson.

The newspaper focuses mostly on highlighting social problems. The reader shows special interest towards the material about the crime.

*Mzera*'s staff do not only describe the situation or state the facts; they also try to introduce journalistic investigation. The newspaper's editorial

board closely cooperates with representatives of the local police. *Mzera* reports on sensitive social problems such as unemployment, drug-abuse, prostitution, trafficking, and migration.

Though the newspaper could collect a stable number of subscribers, it still faces financial problems. There are no advertising orders. The newspaper has never received grants from any international donor organisation.

The newspaper has a computer and four dictaphones. It is edited and designed in Samtredia, but is then printed in Tbilisi on A3 paper. *Mzera* consists of 12 pages and is published once a week with a circulation of 1,000-1,200 copies. The retail price of the newspaper is 40 tetri.

The paper employs a staff of six people: an editor, four journalists and a computer specialist.

## **Khoni**

### ***Mega TV Television Company***

This television company was founded in 1991 by a private individual and is a limited company. Between 1991 and 1996 *Mega TV* broadcast on a decimetre channel, but after 1996 it was given a new metric frequency by the National Communications Regulatory Commission.

The television company fills its airtime mostly with movies and music videos, although it has its own news updates and analytical programmes. *Mega TV* receives the information for its news releases from Kutaisi, Tskaltubo and Martvili, where it has its information offices. Its strategy is to become a regional broadcasting company, which is not impossible given its existing technical and human resources.

To achieve its current state, *Mega TV* was greatly assisted by grants from international donor organizations (IREX, the Eurasia Foundation and the Open Society – Georgia Foundation) for its organisational, technical and professional development. Their support had a special significance during the pre-election period, when despite pressure from the government, the company succeeded in playing the role of mediator between society and political groups in the Martvili and Khoni districts.

*Mega TV's* relationship with the government has been smooth, except in rare cases. As a rule, the situation gets more tense during elections. After the Rose Revolution, however, the channel became interested in how reasonably and transparently the local government was spending money allo-

cated from the central budget. This worsened the situation, but *Mega TV* did not face any direct pressure, although there was a dispute about the legal privatisation of the building that the TV company had purchased as an office before the Revolution.

*Mega TV* pays attention not only to political issues, but also to other issues which society perceives as a problem. The channel's airspace is opened up to the public and to various civil groups; many programmes have been prepared concerning the religious and ethnic minorities residing in the Khoni district. Thus, for example, there was a special programme dedicated to the opening of a Catholic Church in the village of Akhalsheni, and this community's celebrations are regularly reported on; a few programmes were prepared about problems related to the community of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kutaisi and Samtredia, and about Muslim Meskhetians residing in the village of Ianeti in Samtredia district. It should be underlined that the company's programmes did not contain any of the aggression towards these minorities which is characteristic of the regional media.

*Mega TV*'s technical equipment consists of six computers (three of which are used for editing), seven camcorders, a few monitors and a transmitter. It covers the districts of Khoni, Martvili and Samtredia. The television company has a broadcasting license which is valid until 2011.

The company has a staff of eight people: a director, a head of the news service, two journalists and two cameramen, an accountant and a technical manager. Furthermore, *Mega TV* employs correspondents and cameramen in Kutaisi, Tskaltubo, Martvili and Samtredia on a contractual basis.

## **Vani**

### **Newspaper *Sachino***

This newspaper is the heir of a periodical, *Kolmeurneobis Mnatobi*, founded by the Executive Committee of the Communist Party of the Vani District in 1932. Later its name became *Gantiadi* (The Dawn), but it has been published under the title *Sachino* since 1991. The newspaper is registered as a limited company and its founder is the Gamgeoba of the Vani district.

*Sachino*'s contents are similar to other district newspapers under state ownership and mainly report the activities of the local government. The newspaper publishes articles reflecting the economic and social situation in

the district, attention is paid to Vani's past, and articles are also published about famous people from the district, the Orthodox religion, and the district's historical and architectural monuments.

The newspaper is financed from the administration's budget, though it gets a small amount of revenue from commercial announcements. Part of *Sachino's* circulation (200 copies) are distributed to subscribers, while the rest are delivered to village Sakrebulo free of charge.

*Sachino's* technical equipment consists of a camera and two dictaphones. It is edited, designed and printed in Kutaisi. The newspaper is printed on A3 paper, consists of eight pages and is published once a month. It has a circulation of 600 copies and its retail price is 40 tetri. The newspaper employs a staff of five people: an editor, a proof-reader and three correspondents.

### **Newspaper *Chveni Gazeti* (Our Newspaper)**

This newspaper was established in 2004 by the non-governmental organisation Youth Centre for Education and Development and is one of the centre's activities. The newspaper is not an independent legal entity.

The activities of the Youth Centre for Education and Development are focused on providing Vani youth with information about the contemporary world. The centre established an Internet centre, which enables interested individuals to search and get familiar with information they are interested in. In order to make this information easily accessible, the centre decided to publish a newspaper that would inform the reader about events taking place in various spheres, such as international politics, economics, show business, sports and culture. *Chveni Gazeti* gets articles from the Internet and translates them, and it also gives the local youth a chance to publish their articles, essays and literary works and thus make them know to their peers. The newspaper does not cover local problems at all, nor does it talk about Georgia's political, economic or social situation.

The newspaper uses the technical resources of the Youth Centre for Education and Development, which consists of seven computers, a scanner, a printer and a photocopier. The newspaper is edited and designed locally, but is then printed in Kutaisi on A3 paper. *Chveni Gazeti* has 16 pages and a circulation of 500 copies. It is published once a month and its retail price is 50 tetri. The centre does not receive a grant to publish *Chveni Gazeti* and sales are the only way for it to cover its publication expenses.



The staff of the Youth Centre for Education and Development are in charge of publishing the newspaper.

## **Bagdati**

### **Newspaper *Bagdati***

This newspaper is the heir of a periodical founded by the Executive Committee of the Communist Party of the Maiakovski District in 1931. Initially, its name was *Sotsialisturi Sopeli* (The Socialist Village), but it was then published under the names *Kolektiuri Sheteva* (The Collective Attack) and *Maiakovski*. In 1990, when the Communist Party lost power, the newspaper became independent and began publishing under the name *Bagdati*. Today the newspaper is a limited company and it is owned by a single person.

The newspaper is actively involved in civil and political activities and local experts consider it to be supporting the interests of the Communist Party and the Samartlianoba (Justice) party. It often publishes historical materials about the Soviet period, the majority of which are dedicated to the personal achievements of Joseph Stalin for the Soviet Union and the whole world.

Since the newspaper supports the Communist Party, it is clearly extremely critical towards the local government. *Bagdati* publishes articles reflecting the current social and economic situation in the district that ‘uncover the intentional harmfulness’ of the district administration. The newspaper pays a lot of attention to the ‘harmful activities’ of local businessmen. The newspaper gives a great deal of space to the poetry of its owner and editor, the majority of which is dedicated to the glory of the past and to Joseph Stalin.

Despite its sharply critical attitude towards the government and local businessmen, *Bagdati* has never come under pressure from them.

*Bagdati* does not have its own technical equipment. It is edited, designed and printed in Kutaisi in A4 format. It consists of eight pages and is published once a month with a circulation of 300 copies. The newspaper is distributed among subscribers.

*Bagdati* employs two people: an editor and a correspondent.

### **Newspaper *Akhali Bagdati* (The New Bagdati)**

This newspaper was founded in 1994 by the Gamgeoba of the Bagdati district. It is registered as a limited company, although it is wholly owned by the state.

Though *Akhali Bagdati* is the publishing body of the local government, it is only partly financed from the local budget and has to pay the rest of its salaries with its own resources. This money is received from sales, and also from advertisements and commercial announcements (obituaries and congratulations).

The newspaper is supervised by the Gamgeoba and is edited to suit its requirements. *Akhali Bagdati* mainly focuses on highlighting the activities of the local government. It publishes the resolutions and decrees and articles on the meetings of the Gamgeoba and Sakrebulo. The paper's editorial board tries to counteract the local administration's diktat by covering local problems in a harmless way, but it cannot publish serious criticism. However, the newspaper has many times written about illegal logging and pension and budget problems. Such articles are followed by a statement of the Gamgeoba's position and by promises that the current situation will be improved. The newspaper pays a lot of attention to the crime situation in the district.

*Akhali Bagdati* also highlights the district's history and cultural life. Articles are published on famous cultural and civil activists from the district. In addition, it also reports on cultural activities held at schools.

*Akhali Bagdati*'s technical equipment is very poor: it has only one computer. The newspaper is edited, designed and printed in Kutaisi on A3 paper; it consists of four pages and its print run ranges from 500 to 1,000 copies. It is published once a fortnight, but this periodicity is not always maintained.

The newspaper employs a staff of six people: an editor, a deputy editor, a computer specialist and three correspondents.

## **Kharagauli**

### **Newspaper *Chemi Kharagauli* (My Kharagauli)**

This newspaper was founded in 1999 by the local Gamgeoba, but in 2000, *Chemi Kharagauli* became a limited company and it is now an independent publication. It has two owners with equal shares.

*Chemi Kharagauli* became an independent publication following a confrontation between the local government and certain political groups. After the newspaper uncovered facts showing that Gamgeoba officials were corrupt, the Gamgebeli expelled the newspaper's editorial board from its office, which was state property. Since this failed to stop the paper from functioning, the Gamgeoba established its own newspaper *Daba Kharagauli*, but this

failed to compete with the independent *Chemi Kharagauli* and did not last for long. *Chemi Kharagauli* was a popular newspaper and there was great demand for it. The paper also earned the dissatisfaction of Gocha Chakhvadze, the local majoritarian candidate at the time. The newspaper published articles showing that Chakhvadze had been deprived of citizenship of Georgia and had been living in Ukraine under the name of George Eristavi. It was thus clear that his participation in the elections was illegal. The candidate insulted the newspaper's staff and warned that he would take revenge. Similar attitudes have been expressed by local people engaged in illegal logging. The newspaper actively reports on foul play in this sphere, the indifference of the government and its cooperation with poachers in illegally chopping down trees in the Borjomi-Kharagauli National Forest Park.

*Chemi Kharagauli* also expresses an interest in social issues. As well as pensions, it also discusses the problems faced by villages in mountainous areas. As a result of an information campaign run by the newspaper, the local government opened a medical unit in one of the remote high-mountainous villages and sent a nurse from the Kharagauli town.

*Chemi Kharagauli* has twice received grants from international donor organisations. The newspaper prepared a special pull-out on anti-corruption initiatives with the help of the Eurasia Foundation, and with the assistance of an IREX grant it was possible to install access to the Internet in the district centre.

*Chemi Kharagauli*'s technical equipment consists of two computers, a scanner, a printer and a dictaphone. The newspaper is edited and printed locally, but is then printed in Kutaisi on A3 paper. The newspaper contains four or eight pages and is published once a week with a circulation of 1,200 copies. Its retail price, correspondingly, is 20 or 40 tetri. The newspaper has 800 subscribers, which provides it with a stable revenue.

The newspaper employs a permanent staff of four people: an editor, an accountant and two journalists; two journalists from Tbilisi also cooperate with the newspaper on a contractual basis.

### **Newspaper *Akhali Khedva Kharagaulshi* (The New Vision in Kharagauli)**

This newspaper was published in 2004 on the initiative of Gocha Chakhvadze, the local majoritarian MP. The newspaper is a limited company and is owned by one person.

*Akhali Khedva Kharagaulshi* deals with all issues that are problematic in the region. It focuses mainly on politics at the local, regional and central level. Special emphasis is placed on social and economic problems that have been solved thanks to initiatives from the local government and the district majoritarian MP. The newspaper also prioritises reports on the district's cultural life.

Its main source of revenue is financial assistance provided by its owner.

The paper's technical resources consist of a computer and two dictaphones. It is edited, designed and printed in Tbilisi on A3 paper. It is four pages long and is published once a fortnight with a circulation of 500 copies. Its retail price is 35 tetri. The newspaper employs a staff of three people: an editor and two journalists.

## **Zestaponi**

### **Television company *Argo TV* / Radio *Argo Plus***

The television company *Argo TV* and the radio station *Argo Plus* were founded as limited companies in 1994 by the same people. They have nine owners, each with equal shares.

The television company and the radio station both started to operate simultaneously in 1995. *Argo TV* made an agreement with the TV company *Rustavi 2* which allows it to broadcast its programmes. This cooperation makes it possible to fill up its air time. The television company's own programmes take up only a minimal amount of time, lasting only for 2-3 hours. This is explained by its financial difficulties and the power deficit in the district. When the audience in the town cannot watch TV programmes because of blackouts, *Argo TV*'s management broadcasts its news and analytical programmes, and also advertisements and commercial announcement, via *Argo Plus* radio. *Argo Plus* itself cooperates with the Russian musical-entertainment radio company *Serebryanni Dozhd*, broadcasting its programmes for a symbolic fee.

The contents of programmes on the television channel and the radio station are identical. The news programme is on air every day except weekends and occupies a 15-minute space after news updates made by *Rustavi 2*, which are shown at 18:00 and 21:00. Its news programmes report on events that have taken place in Zestaponi and neighbouring villages during the day.

Beyond news updates, the television company also arranges one-hour live talk shows with representatives from the local government and political parties, and prominent people in sports, culture and education. People can call in during the programme and ask questions to the invited guests. The talk show is simultaneously broadcast via the radio.

The television company generates revenue from advertising and commercial announcements, which occupy one or more hours of its airtime.

Traditionally, the television company has always had a good relationship with the local government, though before the elections on 2 November 2003 it had got so bad that on the government's request the administration of the Zestaponi Ferro-Alloy factory removed the television company's transmitter from the factory chimney, thus endangering its ability to continue broadcasting. *Argo TV*'s management used to give a podium to opposition parties, among them the Unified National Movement, which the party in government found particularly unpleasant and the local government found unacceptable. After the Rose Revolution, the relationship between the Government and the television and radio company was brought back under control.

The paper's technical equipment was seriously damaged in a fire and at the moment consists of a computer, two VCRs, which are used for editing, and four camcorders, a digital synchroniser, an audio mixer and their own transmitter. The television channel and the radio station cover the whole Zestaponi district and parts of Chiatura, Kharagauli, Terjola and Kutaisi. Its broadcasting license is valid until 2011.

Twenty-five people work for *Argo TV* and *Argo Plus*.

### **Newspaper *Zestaponis Moambe* (The Zestaponi Messenger)**

This newspaper is the heir of a periodical founded by the Executive Committee of the Communist Party of the Zestaponi District in 1931. Initially its name was *Mshromelta Entuziazmi* (The Workers' Enthusiasm), but it then changed its name to *Lenineli*. The newspaper became independent in 1992 and since then it has been published under the name *Zestaponis Moambe*. The paper is currently a limited company and it was founded by the same group of people that founded the television company *Argo TV* and the radio station *Argo Plus*.

*Zestaponis Moambe* receives a revenue on the basis of an agreement with the local government to highlight its activities. The newspaper also gets some revenue from commercial advertisements.

The contents of the newspaper are defined by its financial relationship and cooperation with the government. Its pages are mostly filled with information on the activities, resolutions and decrees of the local government. *Zestaponis Moambe* does not have an active political or civil position.

The newspaper has a few dictaphones and a camera. It is edited, designed and printed in Kutaisi on A3 paper; it consists of four pages and is published once a fortnight with a circulation of 400 copies and a retail price of 20 tetri.

The newspaper has a staff of four people: an editor, a deputy editor, a secretary and five journalists.

## **Tkibuli**

### **Newspaper *Tkibulis Moambe* (The Tkibuli Messenger)**

This newspaper is the heir of a periodical founded by the Executive Committee of the Communist Party of the Tkibuli District in 1931. Initially it was called *Tkibulis Magaroeli* (The Tkibuli Miner). In the 1990s it was published under the name *Tkibuli* and was the local government's publication. In 2004, the local Gamgeoba reorganised the newspaper and changed its name as well.

*Tkibulis Moambe* was reorganised because its management was inefficient and there was low demand for the newspaper. Though it got funding from the local budget, it was not published regularly or not published at all. The governmental subsidy amounts to 2,000 lari a year. The Gamgeoba expected *Tkibulis Moambe* to generate most of the money for its publication itself, but since there is no advertising market the newspaper fails to attract that amount. Thus even after its reorganisation it was not possible to achieve the desired outcome. The newspaper faces permanent crisis and it is impossible to publish it regularly.

The newspaper focuses on reporting the activities of the local government. It publishes the resolutions and decrees of the Tkibuli Gamgeoba and Sakrebulo, and articles about the meetings, gatherings, and reports of village Sakrebulo, the work they have done, and the results of agricultural projects implemented in the district with state finances. Beyond this, the newspaper also pays a lot of attention to difficult civil situation in the town. *Tkibulis Moambe* writes a lot about the district's past and its famous citizens, famous miners and heroes of socialist labour. The newspaper also focuses on the Orthodox religion and Orthodox celebrations.

The newspaper does not have its own technical equipment. It used to be edited, designed and printed in Tbilisi, but all this is now done in Kutaisi. The newspaper is printed on A3 paper, consists of 10 pages, has a circulation of 800 copies, and is published once a month (this periodicity is not always maintained). Its retail price is 40 tetri.

The newspaper has a staff of four people: an editor, an accountant and two correspondents.

### **Newspaper *Okriba***

This newspaper was originally published by the charitable organisation *Okriba*. In 1998, it was re-registered and became a limited company. It is owned by a single person.

The newspaper refuses to focus on civil-political issues and has chosen a more factual, essay-like orientation. It publishes articles about the history of the region and Georgia in general, and about famous people and their links with the Tkibuli district. *Okriba* allocates a lot of space to highlighting the district's monuments and its historical and cultural heritage, and to discussing the present condition of its cradles of spiritual life (functioning monasteries of the Orthodox Church of Georgia). The newspaper often publishes the poems of local poets, essays and other works, and excerpts from the works of classical Georgian writers.

The newspaper has no revenue. According to its editor, the newspaper is published thanks to the charity of local and Tbilisi-based business people.

*Okriba's* technical equipment consists only of one computer. It is printed on A3 paper, its number of pages ranges from four to 12, and it has a circulation of 1,000. It is not published on a stable basis, on average once every two months. The newspaper is edited, designed and printed either in Tbilisi or in Kutaisi. The only people working for *Okriba* are its founder and an editor.

### ***Nakerala* Television Company**

This television company was founded in 1996 by a private individual. It broadcasts only once a week, for one hour on Wednesdays. Its only programme is a news update reporting on events that took place during the week. The company has made an agreement with the local Gamgeoba to highlight its activities, though the company does not do this since the Gamgeoba is not paying the money that was stipulated in the agreement.

*Nakerala's* only source of revenue is commercial announcements, but there are no advertisements.

*Nakerala's* technical equipment consists of four VCRs and two camcorders. It broadcasts to parts of Tkibuli.

Only two people work for the TV company: a director and a journalist.

## **Terjola**

### **Newspaper *Terjola***

This newspaper is the heir of a periodical founded by the Executive Committee of the Communist Party of the Terjola District in 1933. Initially its name was *Chkharis Kolmeurne*, then *Sakolmeurneo Sopeli*. It has been called *Terjola* since 1989. The paper is currently a limited company, owned by the Gamgeoba of the Terjola district.

The newspaper mostly reports on the activities of the local Gamgeoba. As well as official documents from the Gamgeoba and Sakrebulo, *Terjola* also publishes articles reflecting the economic and social situation in the district.

The Gamgeoba transfers 250 lari per issue to publish its materials in the paper. *Terjola* also gets financial assistance from village Sakrebulos, which are its main subscribers.

The paper's technical equipment consists of a computer, a printer, a scanner, a dictaphone and a camera. It is edited and designed locally, but is then printed in Tbilisi. *Terjola* is published on A3 paper, takes up eight pages, and is published once a fortnight with a print run of 1,000 copies.

The newspaper employs a staff of seven people: an editor, an executive secretary, an accountant, three journalists and a photo correspondent.

## **Chiatura**

### **Newspaper *Chiatura***

This newspaper is the heir of a periodical founded by the Executive Committee of the Communist Party of the Terjola District in 1929. During the Soviet period, its name was *Chiaturis Magaroeli* (The Miner of Chiatura), but in 2000 its name was changed to *Chiatura*. The newspaper is owned by the editors and is registered as a limited company.



The newspaper focuses mostly on highlighting the activities of the local Gamgeoba, Sakrebulo and governmental bodies. It is more like a news leaflet which enables the local government to publish official documents. *Chiatura* publishes the resolutions and orders of the Gamgeoba and Sakrebulo, the list of entities to be privatised developed by the Chiatura branch of the State Department for Property Management; and also announcements from the police and the Gamgeoba. The newspaper reviews local events based on outdated information and is not analytical.

The newspaper made an agreement with the Gamgeoba to highlight its activities in exchange for a certain amount of funding. Some revenue is generated from its subscribers: local government bodies and village Sakrebulo. The newspaper has almost no advertisements and its space is used for commercial announcements, congratulations and obituaries.

The paper's technical equipment consists only of one dictaphone. It is edited, designed and printed in Tbilisi on A3 paper. *Chiatura* has four pages and is published once a week, or sometimes once a fortnight. Its retail price is defined by the agreement.

The newspaper employs a staff of six people: an editor, an executive editor, a literary worker, a proofreader, an accountant and an administrative officer.

### **Newspaper *Chiatura XXI***

This newspaper was founded by the local Gamgeoba in 2002, but it faces financial problems and the newspaper is published once a month, but irregularly. It is cheaper for the Gamgeoba to publish information about its activities in *Chiatura* than in *Chiatura XXI*.

The newspaper has no technical equipment. It is printed in Kutaisi on A3 paper, contains four pages and has a circulation of 500 copies. Its retail price is 20 tetri, but is not sold and is distributed to state organisations free of charge.

The paper has three people working for it: an editor and two correspondents.

### **Newspaper *Arena***

This newspaper was published in 1999 as the result of a civil initiative. It is published by sponsors and charitable bodies and is distributed free of charge. *Arena* only publishes materials about sports in Chiatura and in

Georgia. The newspaper pays most attention to football and publishes the results and fixture lists of qualifying matches for the European and World Cups. *Arena* popularises the local football club and is basically a leisure information bulletin.

At election times, candidates finance the paper in order to use this popular newspaper to improve their image.

The newspaper does not have its own technical equipment. It is printed in Tbilisi on A3 paper, consists of four to eight pages and is published on an unstable basis. *Arena's* circulation, like its periodicity and size, depends on its funding, and ranges from 500 to 2,000.

The newspaper's only employee is its editor.

### ***Imervizia* Television and Radio Company**

This television company was founded in 1989 as a cable television channel. In 1991, *Imervizia* started to broadcast on a metric channel, while the radio station began operating in 1999 and re-broadcasts *Pirveli Radio* (The First Radio). The television and radio company is a limited company; it has five owners, with 54% belonging to one of them and the rest shared equally among the other four.

The television channel mostly just broadcasts programmes from *Rustavi 2*. *Imervizia's* programmes occupy only three hours: from 18:00 to 20:00 and from 22:00 to 23:00. Its airtime is filled with news updates, a music show, TV shopping and announcements. *Imervizia's* news updates are on television for 15-20 minutes four times a week. It reports on local problems. It has an agreement with the local Gamgeoba, according to which the Gamgeoba is supposed to pay the company for reporting on its activities. Its news programmes prepare articles on the social and economic situation in the town. The TV channel pays a lot of attention to the daily social problems of people working in mangane mining. *Imervizia* cooperates closely with the police to report on the crime situation in the district.

The main revenue for the TV radio company is generated from commercial announcements, congratulations, obituaries and TV shop. Small income is provided by highlighting the activities of the local government. Besides, the main shareholder of the TV company has opened a computer and language centre with the radio that can cover the expense of the TV radio company, whenever needed.

*Imervizia's* television and radio studios have the following technical equipment: 11 computers, one digital and three VHS camcorders, appliances, two mixers, a remote control studio management system, microphones, a main and a reserve transmitter. Its broadcast signal covers the whole of Chiatura and parts of the Zestaponi and Sachkhere districts.

The television and radio company employs 19 people: a director, head of the advertising department and three advertising agents, head of the news programme and three journalists, eight cameramen, an accountant and a cleaner.

## **Sachkhere**

### **Newspaper *Modi Nakhe* (Come and See)**

This newspaper is the heir of a periodical founded by the Executive Committee of the Communist Party of the Sachkhere District in 1939. Initially its name was *Oktombris Gzit* and it was then changed to *Talgha* (The Wave) in the 1990s. The newspaper became *Modi Nakhe* in 2003, when it started being published by the Sachkhere non-governmental association, Mass Media.

Though *Modi Nakhe* is published by a non-governmental organisation, in fact it is a local government body, since it is published with finances provided by the Gamgeoba and is focused on highlighting its activities. The newspaper publishes official documents approved by the Gamgeoba and Sakrebulo. Other than the government's activities, the newspaper also publishes large articles on famous people working in the cultural, healthcare and educational spheres. The newspaper attaches a lot of significance to important dates, when the whole issue is dedicated to the anniversaries of famous writers or public figures. The newspaper also publishes religious materials.

*Modi Nakhe* does not have its own technical resources. It is edited, designed and printed in Tbilisi on A3 paper. The newspaper has eight pages and is published once a fortnight with a print run of 500 copies and a retail price of 40 tetri.

*Modi Nakhe* employs a staff of six people: an editor, an executive secretary, a typist, an accountant and two journalists.

## Tskaltubo

### Newspaper *Tskaltubo*

This newspaper is the heir of a periodical founded by the Tskaltubo Executive Committee of the Communist Party in 1939. Initially its name was *Akhali Tskaltubo*, later *Drosha*, and then became *Tskaltubo* in the 1990s. The newspaper is currently a limited company and is owned by its editors.

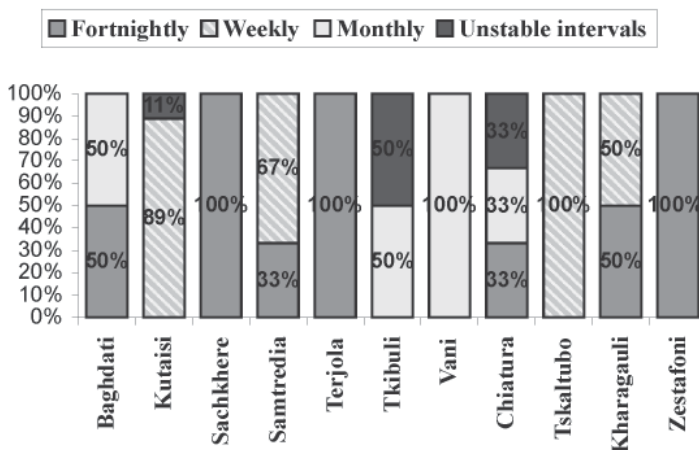
The newspaper is formally independent, but due to its permanent financial problems, it performs the functions of the publishing body of the local government. *Tskaltubo* has an agreement with the local Gamgeoba and Sakrebulo, which pay the newspaper to highlight their activities. Beyond reporting on the local government's activities, the newspaper also publishes articles on local social problems.

Recently, most of its articles have been about the power deficit and the limited power supply schedule. Almost all editions of the newspaper have included religious material referring to the essence of the Orthodox religion and its celebration; aggressive articles are often written about religious minorities.

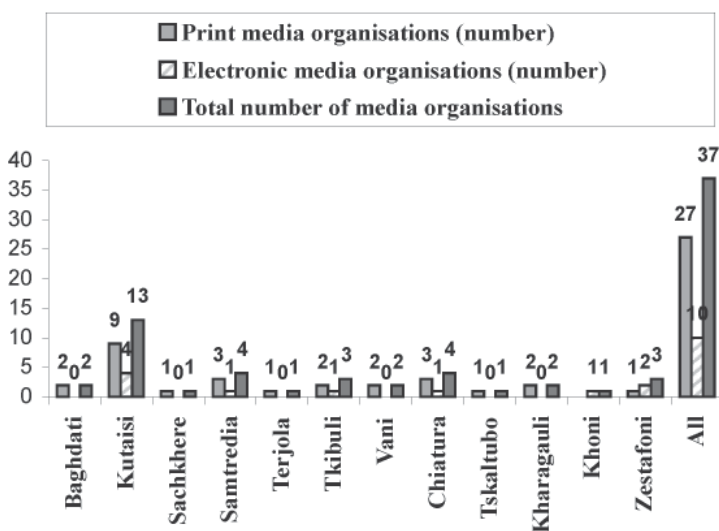
The newspaper has no technical equipment; it is designed and printed in Kutaisi on A3 paper. *Tskaltubo* consists of four pages and is published once a week with a circulation of 400 copies. The entire circulation is distributed to subscribers, which are people employed in state structures. Its retail price is 30 tetri.

*Tskaltubo* has a staff of six people: an editor, a deputy editor, a typist, a proof-reader, an accountant and a journalist, who at the same work at the Gamgeoba press centre.

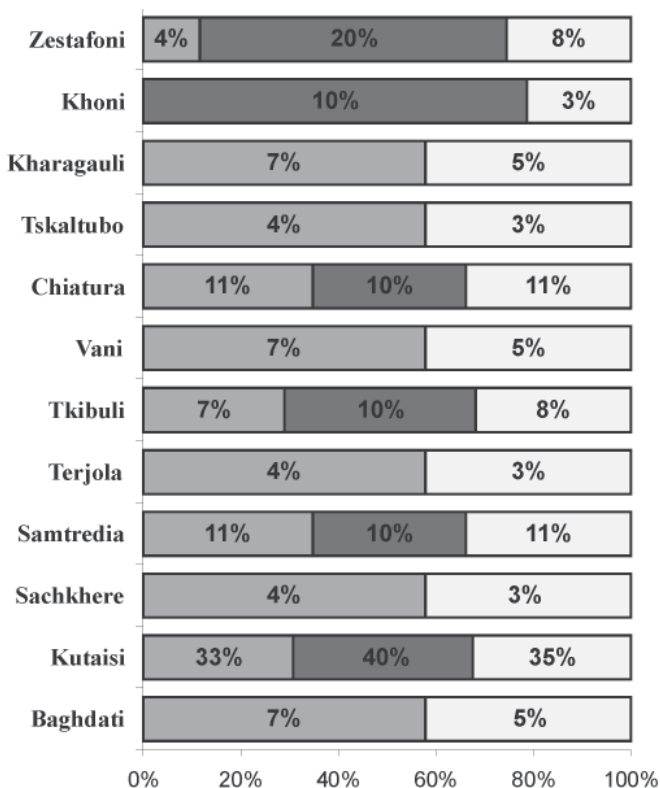
### Publication intervals of print media organisations in Imereti by district



### Number of media organisations in Imereti by district

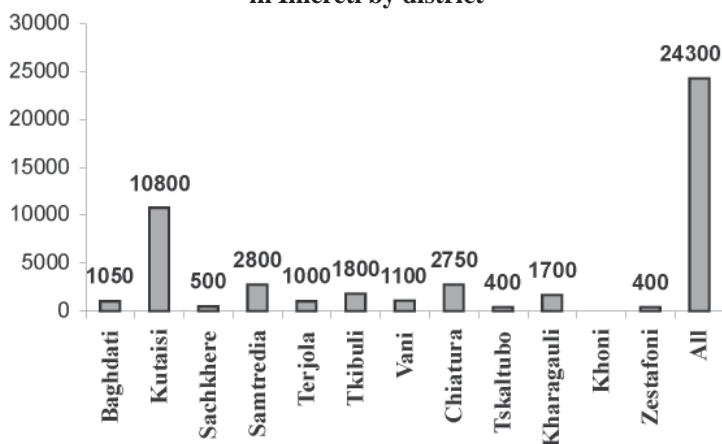


**Percentage distribution of media organisations  
in Imereti by district**

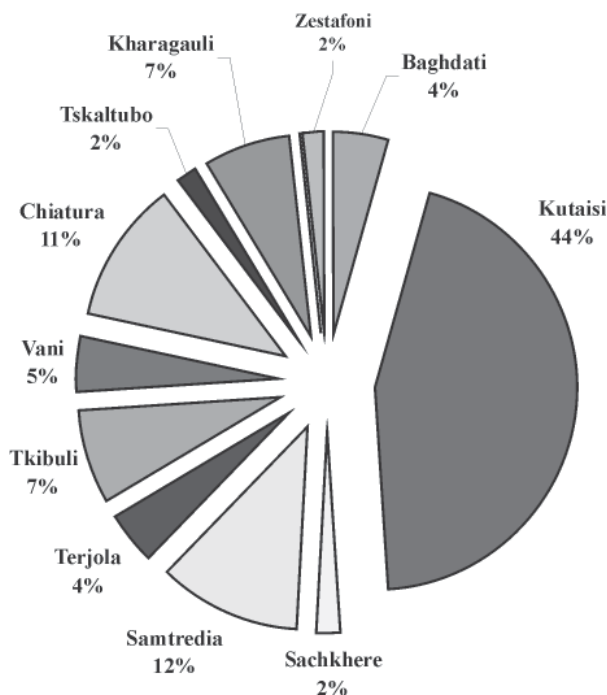


Print media organisations  
 Electronic media organisations  
 Media organisations

**Overall circulation of print media  
in Imereti by district**

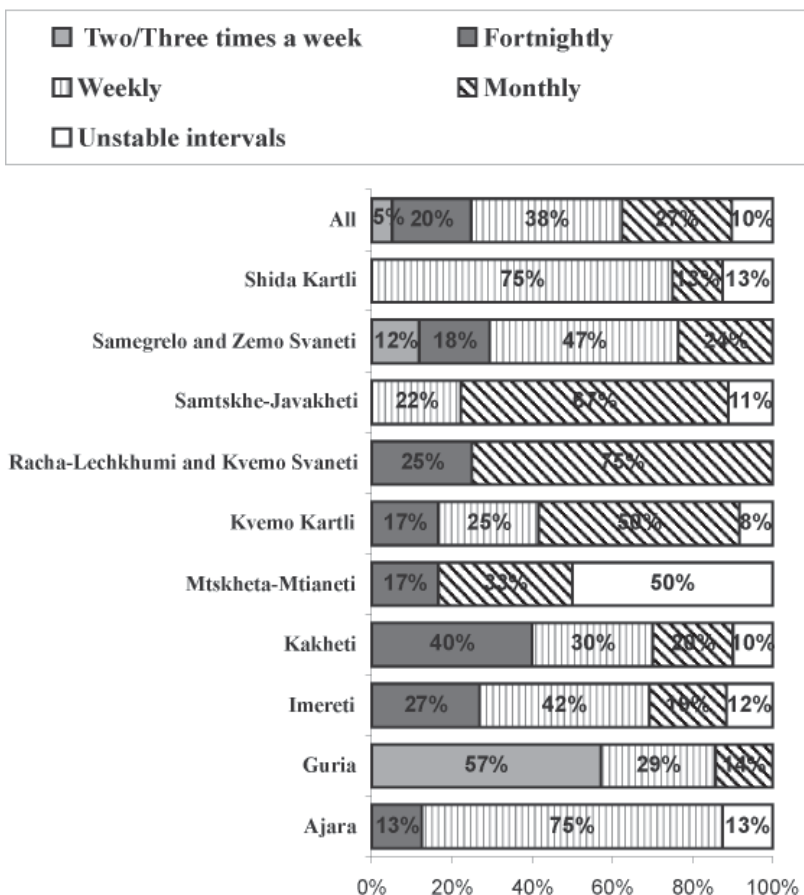


**Pie chart showing overall circulation of print media  
in Imereti by district**



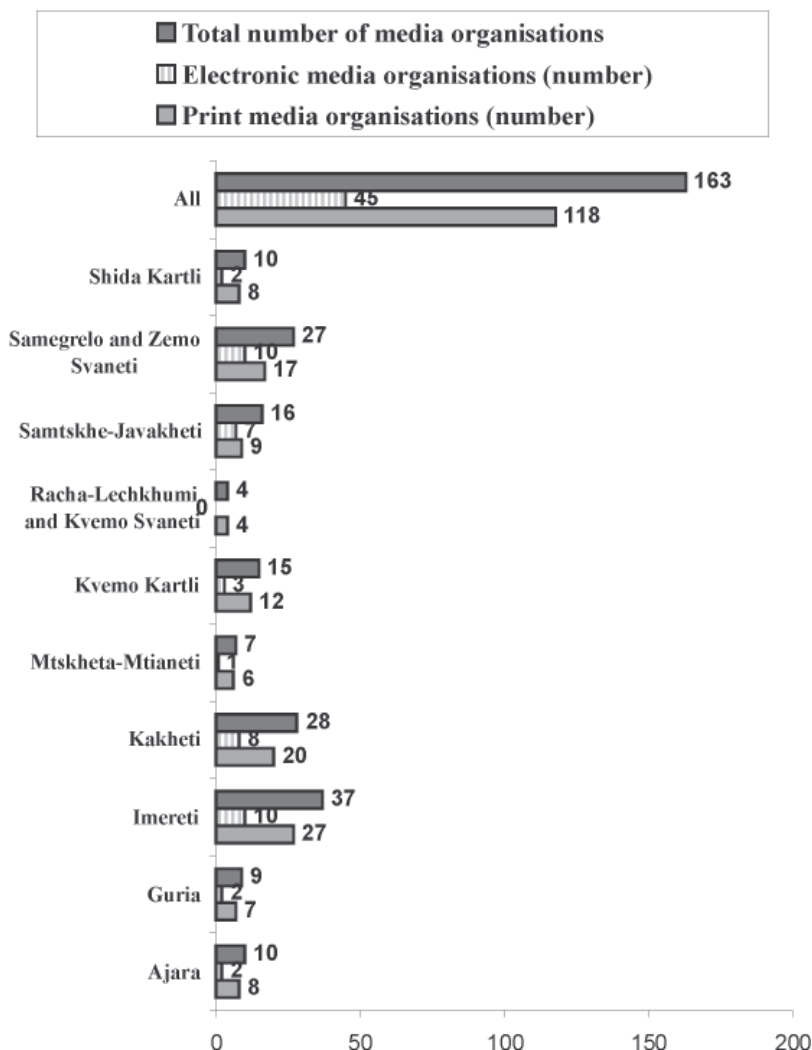
# CHARTS DEPICTING THE REGIONAL MEDIA SITUATION IN GEORGIA

Publication intervals of print media organisations  
in Georgia by region

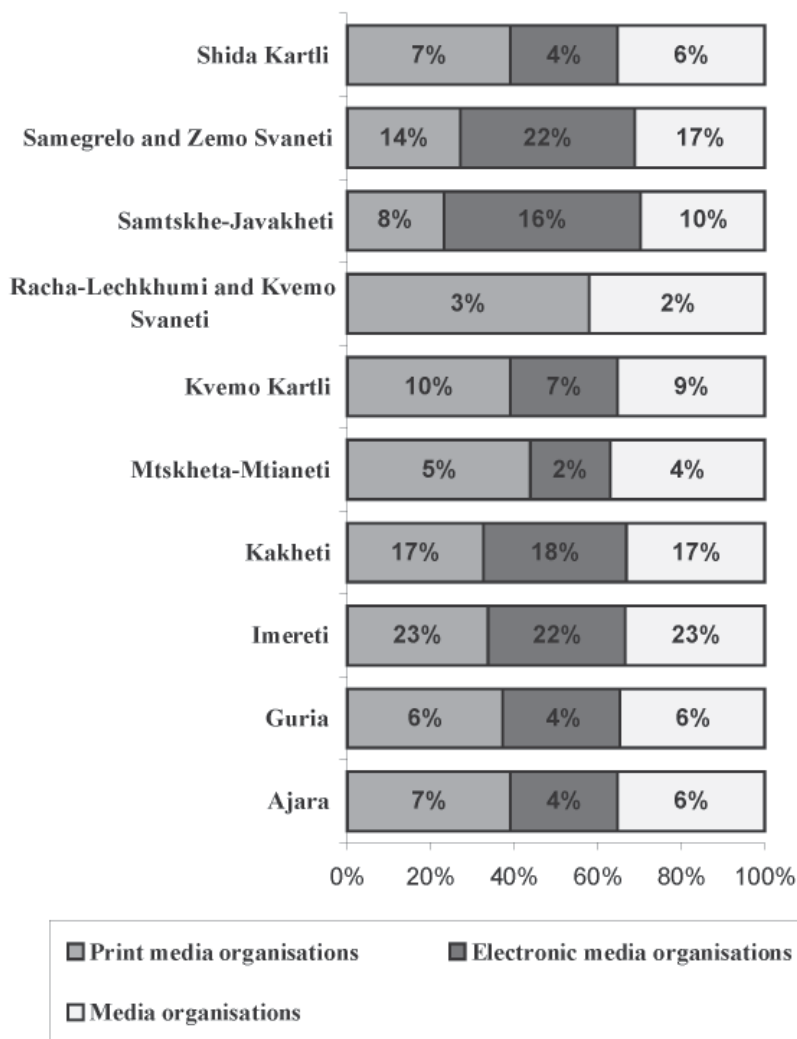




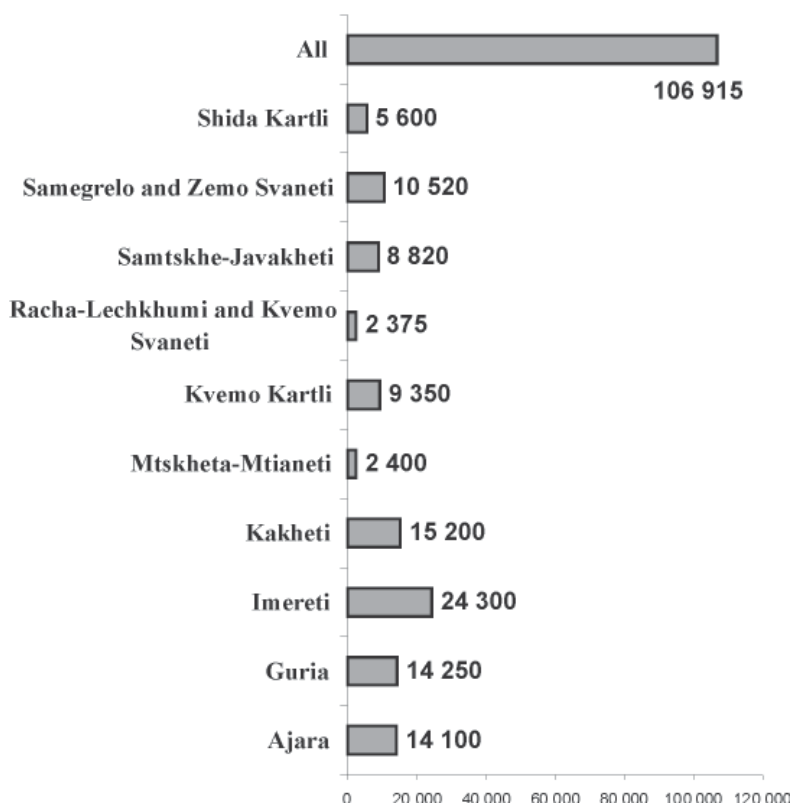
# Number of media organisations in Georgia by region



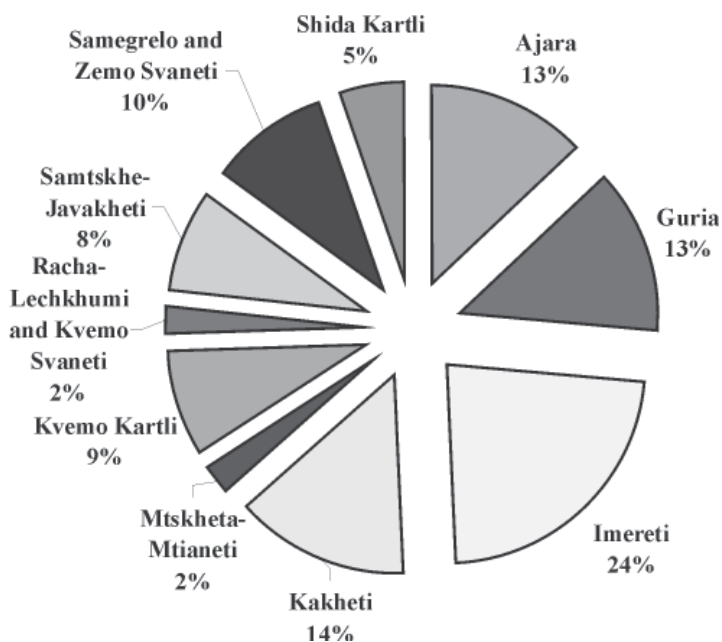
**Percentage distribution of media organisations  
in Georgia by region**



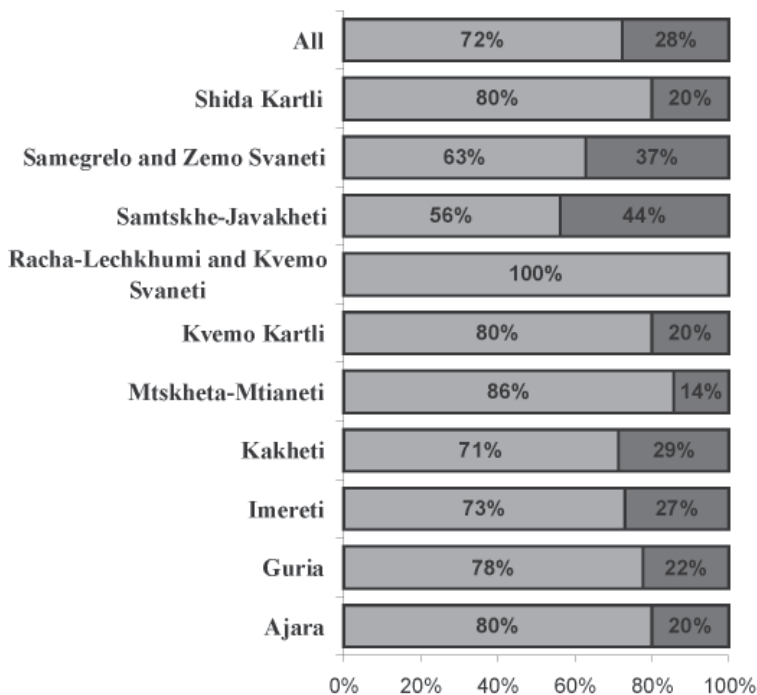
### Overall circulation of print media in Imereti by district



**Pie chart showing overall circulation of print media  
in Georgia by region**



### Percentage ratio of electronic media to print media in Georgia by region



■ Print media organisations

■ Electronic media organisations

