

# REVIEW OF THE MEDIA CRITIC PLATFORM



**IDFI**

Institute for Development  
of Freedom of Information



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## Introduction

On August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018, the Georgian National Communication Commission (the Commission/GNCC) established NNLE Media Academy (Media Academy) and granted it the mandate of promoting media literacy in Georgia.

The Media Academy was founded based on the Law of Georgia on Broadcasting and the Law of Georgia on Electronic Communications to achieve the goals determined by similar laws. The GNCC approves the Academy's budget, staff, and remuneration in accordance with the charter of the Media Academy. The chairman of the GNCC unilaterally appoints and dismisses the Executive Director of the Academy. Moreover, the Executive Director of the Academy can only appoint and dismiss directors of the academy's structural entities with the consent of the chairman of GNCC.

In August 2018, Davit Kakabadze was appointed the Executive Director of the Media Academy. Prior to this position, from 2005 until January 2018, he was the head of the Georgian Service of the Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). There is no detailed information proactively published about the Head of the Academy, as Media Academy does not have a separate website. However, its Facebook page info contains a link to the website of GNCC, where one can view the news about the Academy by clicking its banner. The budget of the Media Academy from the moment of its establishment looks as follows:

Year	Budget
2018 <sup>1</sup>	501,346.71
2019	2,469,751.50
2020	3,092,809

According to the information provided by the GNCC on January 13th, 2020, budget execution report of the Academy is as follows:

### 2018 (5 months):

Expenses of Media Academy	Expenses in GEL
Fixed assets	7,698.00
Business Trips	2,546.00
Bank service fee	160.19
Training	13,412.00
Salary	31,484.00
State Budget Deduction	7,871.00
<b>Total:</b>	<b>63,171.19</b>

<sup>1</sup> 5 months of 2018 (August-December)

**2019 (11 months)**

Expenses of Media Academy	Expenses in GEL
Fixed assets	<b>420,518.21</b>
Salary	<b>265,434.17</b>
Administrative and operational expenses	<b>1,214,366.85</b>
<b>Total:</b>	<b>1,900,319.23</b>

## Media Academy Platforms

Media Academy owns several platforms:

- [Media School](#) - for training journalists, producers, and media managers;
- [Media Lab](#) - for supporting and financing digital media startups;
- [Media Critic](#) - for analyzing and [evaluating](#) Georgian media products;

According to the news published on the website of GNCC, Giorgi Putkaradze is the Head of the Media School. At different times, he held the positions of journalist and later the Head of the news department at the Georgian Public Broadcaster and the General Producer of TV Maestro. The same basic information about the leadership of Media Lab and Media Critic is not available.

It is notable that a significant number of media experts [expressed concern](#) that, by establishing the Academy, GNCC started regulating media content and exceeded its legal power. Moreover, it created a risk of censorship and the [possibility](#) of using this platform against critical media. In response to such doubts, it is crucial for the Media Academy and its umbrella platforms to act openly and transparently.

## Media Critic

IDFI took an interest in the platforms of the Academy, as the information about them is not proactively published. For the purposes of this study, we looked into the activities of the Media Critic platform.

The website of the Media Critic indicates that the project was created for “analyzing and evaluating media products in order to raise the quality of the media”. Its aim is to provide the society with professional and qualified analysis to ensure critical perception of news and informed choices. The Media Academy also

elaborated its editorial code “MediaPlatform”, which is the baseline of the activities of the Media Critic. Information about the number of employees, hired experts, and project budget is not available.

In January 2020, IDFI addressed the Media Academy with a FOI letter requesting various pieces of public information, including the copies of the legal acts defining the mandate of the Media Critic, the activities carried out by the platform, their budgets, and relevant costs along with remunerations of the experts.

The entity, however, refused to disclose public information, indicating that it was not a legal entity under public law, neither in an organizational nor in a functional definition, and thus refused to abide by existing legislation on freedom of information.

IDFI appealed the Media Academy's refusal letter to the Georgian National Communications Commission, as it represents the founding and oversight body of the Media Academy, to which the Academy is accountable and the execution of the responsibilities, as determined by law, of which became the basis for the establishment of the Academy. The Commission considered the case inadmissible on the grounds that the mere fact that the Academy was established by the Commission did not constitute sufficient grounds to conclude that the Commission was a supervisory body of the Media Academy.

**With the aim of exercising its right to access public information, IDFI referred the case to the Tbilisi City Court. However, 6 months after the preliminary hearing, which was held in June 2020, the date of the main hearing still has not been marked.**

Considering the above-mentioned non-transparent activities, IDFI studied the publicly disclosed information on the website of the Media Critic platform and analyzed its contents as well as the information about the authors.

## Objects of the Media Critic

A total of 308 texts have been published on the platform of the Media Critic as of December 23th, 2020. 60 of these fall under the category of Review, 65 - Blog ,and 183 - Commentary.

IDFI tried to analyze each of the published texts and categorize them by topic and media outlets criticized within. The results of this analysis can be seen in the following table.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The sum of the numbers disclosed in the table may not coincide with the total number of reviews published, as some reviews include more than one media outlet.

## Reviews - Analytical Direction on Media Critic

Media Outlet	Number of Reviews
General	26
Mtavari TV	16
TV Pirveli	10
Formula	3
Rustavi 2	4 <sup>3</sup>
Netgazeti	2
Radio Liberty	1
Imedi TV	2

As seen in the table above, most of the reviews focus on the media outlets critical of the government, followed by general reviews where precise media outlets have not been identified. Nevertheless, none of the reviews cover the First Channel of the Georgian Public Broadcaster, whereas Imedi TV is mentioned in several texts, but only [one of them](#) can be identified as criticism. It is notable that none of the Reviews, Blogs, or Commentaries mention Adjara TV, POSTV, Obiektivi and Kavkasia TV.

## Blogs - Rubric for Author Opinions

Media Outlet	Number of Blogs
General	38
Mtavari TV	14
TV Pirveli	3
“Oppositional Media”	9
Formula	3
Imedi	2
GPB	1
Mattew Bryza	1
Inga Grigolia	1
MDF	1

The primary focus in the Blog direction lies in general texts, followed by “oppositional media”. It is important to note that authors of Media Critic often classify several media outlets as “oppositional media” (Mtavari TV, Formula, TV Pirveli) and frequently use the term to refer to them collectively. Some articles do not criticize specific media, although they may refer to the above-mentioned collective term, while in

<sup>3</sup> One of the reviews covers the period when Rustavi 2 was under previous ownership.



some cases the three media outlets labeled as “oppositional” are criticized by name. Both of the cases are included in the category “oppositional media” of the table.

An interesting fact is that an article criticizing the American diplomat and former high official of the State Department, Matthew Bryza, was included in the Blog direction. The changes to the law of electronic communications developed by GNCC, which invited negative assessment from [international society](#), [private](#) and [non governmental](#) sectors, is the main topic of the article. The opinion of the author perfectly coincides with the arguments of GNCC and explains the negative assessment issues by Matthew Bryza with his close connections to the UNM and his personal interest in the case. Apart from the fact that the article reflects the position of the Commission, it is confusing that this content would be published on a platform that should be dedicated to media criticism.

### Commentary - Direction Oriented on Daily News

Media Outlet	Number of Commentaries
Mtavari TV	95
TV Pirveli	33
General	28
Formula	15
Online Media	14
“Oppositional Media”	10
Imedi TV	9
Rustavi 2	5
GPB	1

As seen from the table, in the Commentary direction, critical media is in the leading position. Exceptional attention to the Mtavari TV is especially noteworthy.

Media Critic has sponsored a total of 41 articles on its Facebook page. Content of the sponsored articles is distributed as follows:

Content	# of sponsored articles
Mtavari TV	23
TV Pirveli	6
Formula	3
General	2
Online media	1
Inga Grigolia	1
Rustavi 2	1
Imedi	1



56% of the total sponsored articles refer to Mtavari TV. The total amount of funds spent on sponsored materials equals 1,228 \$; thus, 690\$ was spent on advertising criticism of Mtavari TV.

## Authors and Experts of Media Critic

IDFI took further interest in the authors creating the content for Media Critic. To analyze this information, we examined the biographies of the authors contained on the platform website and grouped each of the authors' texts based on the topics they covered in their articles. It is notable that biographical information of the authors is not available on the Media Critic website. Moreover, the Academy refused to disclose information about the total amount of funds spent on the remuneration of authors.

### [Archil Sikharulidze](#)

Expert of international relations and contributor to the First Channel of the Georgian Public Broadcaster. Sikharulidze is a frequent respondent of Sputnik's Russian [edition](#). He participated in several [events](#), including a [Media Forum](#) organized by the Primakov Center that was held in Tbilisi.

Archil Sikharulidze contributed to the Media Critic with a total of 11 articles, 4 of them about Mtavari TV, 4 - "oppositional media", 1 - general, and 1 - TV Pirveli. Merely one text directly criticizes Imedi TV, in the other three cases "oppositional media" is discussed as the establisher of negative standards, with Imedi TV unintentionally reflecting this tendency.

### [Zviad Avaliani](#)

Journalist, former employee of POSTV, Obiektivi and GPB. He is an author of 17 articles published on the Media Critic platform. Seven of his total 17 texts focus on Mtavari TV, 2 - Formula, 2 - TV Pirveli, 1 - Netgazeti. Public accusations toward Netgazeti from the Georgian Dream representative of Adjara High Council, later the chairman of GNCC, preceded the publication of the article criticizing the outlet.

The rest of the articles by Avaliani are mostly general or refer to every media outlet; only two of them mentioned Imedi TV.

### [Lela Kurdghelashvili](#)

Journalist, former employee of GPB and Koka Kandiashvili's online outlet "Espersona". She is the author of 20 articles written for the Media Critic platform, including the above-mentioned article supporting the position of GNCC and criticising Matthew Bryza. Ten out of her 20 articles are about Mtavari TV, 4 - TV

Pirveli, 1 - Formula, 6 - general. Some of the general blogs mention Imedi TV in order to demonstrate the problem of media polarization.

### [Khatuna Kighuradze](#)

Journalist. Most of her texts fall into the rubric Commentary, which is oriented toward daily news. Kighuradze has published a total of 85 Commentaries. A high number of articles indicate that she might not be a hired expert or author, but an employee of the platform. Most of her Commentaries refer to Mtavari TV, Formula, and TV Pirveli, although some of the articles criticise Imedi TV or are general in nature

### [Manana Mtchedlishvili](#)

Journalist. Similar to Khatuna Kighuradze, most of her texts fall into the rubric Commentary and cover daily news. She has published 92 articles on the platform, most of which criticise “oppositional media”.

### [Rezo Sakevarishvili](#)

Journalist, former director of Imedi TV, former editor-in-chief of Forbes Georgian edition. In 2015 he was appointed as the temporary administrator of Rustavi 2 by the decision of the judge, Tamaz Urtmelidze. Sakevarishvili has published 18 articles on the Media Critic platform, and most of them are on general topics. He never mentions particular media outlets and focuses on general issues in media or economic problems.

### [Mikheil Vardzelashvili](#)

Former journalist on GPB. He is an author of 8 articles published on the Media Critic, one of them referring to Mtavari TV, 1 - Formula da Mtavari TV, 2 - Rustavi 2, four of them carry general content.

### [Vakhtang Maisaia](#)

Political scientist, worked at the Ministry of Defence and in the NATO defense mission. He is an author of 2 articles on the platform, both related to coverage from hotspots.

### [Basa Janikashvili](#)

Writer and playwright. He has 10 published articles on the Media Critic and all of them on dramaturgy of the plot. Thus, all of his texts fall into the general category.

### [Zaal Anjaparidz](#)

Analyst, in 2016 participated in the contest for the selection of GPB General Director. He has published 9 articles on the platform, 4 of them about Mtavari TV, 1 - “oppositional media”, 1 - TV Pirveli, 2 - general (with the pitch on Netgazeti), and 1 - non governmental organization Media Development Fund (MDF) and its 2019 annual report on anti-western propaganda.

### [Zaza Piralishvili](#)

Philosopher. He has published two articles on the Media Critic, both of them are general in nature and do not involve criticism.

### [Levan Bregadze](#)

Journalist, philologist and critic. He is an author of 13 articles on the platform, with all of them relating to accurate speaking and writing language, hence general topics.

### [Kravai Jakeli](#)

An author who supposedly writes under a pen name has published 2 blogs, both of them general: one examines the freedom of expression online, and the other reviews Georgian media in general terms.

### [Ana Lomtadze](#)

As her article states, Lomtadze is a journalist, although no additional information is available online. Two blogs are published under her name on the platform: one reviews the work of journalists, and the other touches on informational overdose in the pandemic period.

### [Guri Sultanishvili](#)

Analyst and anchor on POSTV, former GPB employee. He has clearly expressed political sympathies for the government. Sultanishvili was a member of an initiative group that named Salome Zurabishvili as a presidential candidate, later supported by the ruling party. He has published 9 Blogs/Commentaries on the Media Academy platform, three of them referring to Mtavari TV, 3 - general, 1 - Formula, 1 - public opinion polls of NDI.

### [Bacho Odisharia](#)

Analyst and co-anchor on POSTV together with Guri Sultanishvili and Shalva Ramishvili. In particular, Odisharia and Sultanishvili lead another show on the same channel titled “Guri and Bacho watch Georgian

media". Media Critic has published 5 of his articles. Most of them cover TV Pirveli and Mtavari TV, while one of them is personally dedicated to Inga Grigolia, TV Pirveli anchor.

### Nukri Shoshiashvili

Nukri Shoshiashvili is also an analyst on POSTV. Among the 3 texts written for the Media Critic, 2 are about TV Pirveli and one reviews informational bubbles. Shoshiashvili often reflects upon Georgian media and non-governmental sector on his Facebook page.

## Conclusion

Media experts expressed several concerns about the fact that the Georgian National Communication Commission established an authority for criticising media and allocated the authority funding from its budget, which includes the income from regulation fees paid by media outlets. More concerns were later raised about the function and impartiality of the Media Academy, and specifically the Media Critic platform, due to shortcomings in terms of transparency in their activities.

Further analysis of the Media Critic content showed that most of its criticism is directed at the media labeled as “oppositional” by the platform’s experts. Most of the sponsored materials on the platform’s Facebook page refer to the same target. In some cases, published articles precede or follow decisions of the GNCC on crucial cases and mostly adhere to its expressed positions.

As mentioned above, three authors of the Media Critic platform are current employees of the TV channel POSTV, which has its own rubric for exposing critical media. In November 2019, POSTV transferred from online to TV broadcasting and became subject to GNCC’s regulations. Thus, hiring current employees of the media under GNCC’s regulation by the organization founded by the GNCC raises concerns about the impartiality of the regulatory body towards POSTV channel. The fact that none of the Media Critic articles refer to POSTV also raises doubts.

IDFI believes that the trustworthiness of the organizations founded and funded by the GNCC should be one of its primary concerns. Therefore, the Commission should guarantee the full transparency of these organizations to prevent doubts about the GNCC encouraging media polarisation or its impartiality towards media outlets.