

Discussion of the Ministry's draft Strategy and Action Plan of Transparency and Integrity



On March 21, IDFI and the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure held a discussion of the Ministry's draft Strategy and Action Plan of Transparency and Integrity. The main aim of the event was to present and gather feedback from non-governmental and international organizations on the draft document.

The first version of the strategy includes 4 priority areas: 1. improving existing mechanisms of ethics and integrity, 2. increasing transparency and public participation, 3. improving the human resources management system, and 4. improving the system of planning, monitoring and internal financial control.

The Letter of President of Georgia Zviad Gamsakhurdia to United States Secretary of State James Baker



IDFI continues to publish declassified documents kept in US archives. This time, IDFI published a letter of the Georgian President Zviad Gamsakhurdia to US Secretary of State James Baker dated December 12, 1991. The letter is a response to the criticism expressed by the US towards President Gamsakhurdia. It is probably also a response to the US diplomatic protest note delivered to the permanent representative of Georgia in Moscow on November 23, 1991 regarding the political situation in Georgia (arrest of opposition leaders and armed conflict in South Ossetia).

Russia's Soft and Hard Power in Georgia



Russian Propaganda is still a prominent topic in Georgia as well as on the international scene. The eminence is all the more striking as Russian interference in US elections, which most probably had an influence on election results, was confirmed. European countries now fully understand the threats of Russian information operations and are trying to take appropriate measures against them.

Strengthening of Russian soft power and propaganda schemes in Georgia has been discussed for several years now. State institutions and different groups are starting to counter disinformation efforts. Propaganda in Georgia is a mix of soft and hard power tactics, something we have discussed extensively in the paper "Kremlin's Information War: Why Georgia Should Develop State Policy on Countering Propaganda". Nevertheless, it is interesting to see what changed in Kremlin propaganda over the years and what we can expect in the future.

Court Decisions in Georgia: How to Negotiate the Minefield Between Access and Respect for Privacy



The academic paper prepared by the Director of the Center for law and Democracy (Canada), Toby Mendel discusses the ways of balancing the interests of freedom of information and privacy. The document is based on the challenges faced by Georgia in regards with access to court decisions, which has become subject of active international discussion as a result of the activities conducted by IDFI. With the aim of addressing existing challenges the paper presents the case law of the European Court of Human Rights.

Training on Local Self-Government Index



On March 9-11, the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), Centre for Training and Consultancy (CTC) and Management Systems Development Center

organizations within the framework of the project “For Open and Accountable Local Government - National Assessment of Transparency and Public Participation of Georgian Municipalities.”

Training was aimed at introducing the methodology of the local self-government index, elaborated within the framework of the project, to partner regional organizations. In the future, these organizations will use this methodology to assess the transparency and accountability of Georgia’s municipalities. Irina Khantadze, CTC Director and Vako Natsvlshvili, Local Democracy Development Program Coordinator at OSGF opened the training. In their welcome speeches, they talked over the project objectives and the role of partner organizations in its successful implementation. Teona Turashvili and Goga Tushurashvili (IDFI), Tamar Naskidashvili (CTC) and Koka Kiguradze (MSDC) led the training.

Gamsakhurdia Continues to Challenge Moscow



March 31 was the birthday of the first President of Georgia Zviad Gamsakhurdia. Furthermore, on the same day, 1991 the referendum was held on the issue of Georgian statehood. The overwhelming majority of Georgians supported the restoration of the

independence of Georgia. In connection to this date, IDFI published the declassified archival documents/report sent from US Embassy in Moscow to US Department of State.

IDFI in the US Department of State’s Country Reports for 2016



The US Department of State published the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2016. The reports are based on data provided by US Embassies, as well as International Missions and reviews the human rights situation in 200 countries, including Georgia.

IDFI has been referred to in the Country Report on Georgia every year since 2012. Similar to previous years, IDFI’s analysis of data related to access to public information is included in the country report on Georgia. Specifically, 2016 report assessing access to information in Georgia was used in the country report, according to which 7,430 freedom of information requests were sent to 294 public institutions.

[Recommendations of IDFI on the Open Parliament Georgia Action Plan 2016-2017](#)



The Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI) as the member of the Open Parliament Georgia Working Group and the Chair of the Permanent Parliamentary Council on Open and Transparent Governance is actively involved in the process of elaboration of the Open Parliament Georgia 2017-2018 Action Plan.

In February 2017, the Institute presented the recommendations on elaboration of the Open Parliament Georgia 2017-2018 Action Plan to the Parliament of Georgia. These recommendations included the following topics:

- Elaboration of Feedback Mechanism for Comments left on Draft Laws;
- Elaboration of a Public Information Module and Simplification of Access to Information on Parliamentary Activities;
- Elaboration of a Public Information Reports Monitoring System;
- Elaboration of a Public Petitions System.

IDFI believes that inclusion of the aforementioned recommendations in the Open

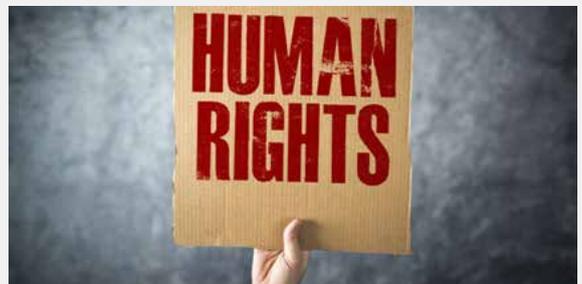
Parliament Georgia 2017-2018 Action Plan will increase involvement of the citizens in lawmaking processes, transparency of the legislative authorities and the citizens' trust in them.

[Resolution of the European Freedom of Information Commissioners and Ombudspersons](#)

On February 23-24, 2017, at an international conference held in Berlin, the European Freedom of Information (FOI) Commissioners and Ombudspersons signed a joint resolution calling on governments in Europe to protect freedom of information and strengthen the role of information commissioners and ombudspersons in their states.

The resolution notes that freedom of information commissioners are present in many European countries and that their role is essential for protecting and strengthening freedom of information.

[Human Rights in Georgia: 1991](#)



IDFI published the document titled the "1991 Country Human Rights Report for the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic" and sent from the U.S. Embassy in Moscow to the State Department. The document discusses political

and human rights situation in USSR and its member republics. IDFI provides information regarding Georgia of that period.

Recommendations of IDFI on the Draft Anti-Corruption Action Plan for 2017-2018



IDFI welcomes the elaboration of new Anti-Corruption Action Plan for 2017-2018. Despite the comprehensive input from the responsible agencies IDFI identified several shortfalls with respect to the reflection of international commitments, derived from the GRECO and OECD-ACN evaluation reports and 2016 London Anti-Corruption Summit Country Statements.

IDFI mentioned as a general comment that some of the paragraphs, indicators and related commitments are technically copied from the previous Action-Plan. In addition, IDFI considers that comparing to the standard that the previous Action-Plan has set, the secretariat of Anti-Corruption Council had possibility to coordinate with the responsible agencies and suggest the policy documents that would fully cover international commitments. However, IDFI hopes that till the approval of the Strategy and Action Plan they will be refined and updated according to the international commitments.

IDFI also considers that ex-post evaluation of the Action-Plan is of crucial importance. This will give the opportunity to the Secretariat as well as responsible agencies to evaluate the gaps and shortcomings and eliminate them for the future Action Plans.

In the first draft of Anti-Corruption Action Plan for 2017-2018 IDFI evaluated existing activities according to the thematic priorities and suggested recommendations on adding various activities and directions.

Georgian NGOs' Address to the European Court of Human Rights

29 non-governmental organizations have addressed the European Court of Human Rights on the Rustavi 2 case. The organizations call for the the European Court of Human Rights to consider the appeal of the TV company and use the right of temporary suspension mechanism until a final decision is made. This is especially important given that throughout the discussion of the case on the national level there have been questions regarding the independence, impartiality of the judges and political motivations of the government.

The Coalition Submits a Written Communication to the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers



Coalition

for an Independent and
Transparent Judiciary

The Coalition for an Independent and Transparent Judiciary submitted a written communication to the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers. The document aims to inform the Committee of Ministers about the state of execution of the so called Garibashvili Groupcases.

The Coalition Calls on the Government to Start Substantial Reforms in the Court System

In the recent Rustavi 2 case, the quality of the court's handling of the case, the procedural problems and questions raised at each stage of the case, and the suspension of enforcement of the Supreme Court's decision by the European Court of Human Rights all confirmed the existence of systemic problems in the justice sector which have been actively pointed out by local and international organizations. At none of the stages of the Rustavi 2 case have the questions arising from the political context of the case been rebutted. Once more, public trust in the court system has been shaken. The Coalition believes that in these circumstances the Government should acknowledge that systemic problems exist in the court system and get determined to ensure judicial independence by commencing substantial reforms in the court system.