

MediaVoice



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ANNUAL REPORT

Media Voice

www.mediavoice.ge

Address by the Founder



As we reflect on the past year, I am filled with immense pride and gratitude for the remarkable progress and resilience demonstrated by "Media Voice." In 2023, our commitment to fostering media freedom, supporting independent journalism, and combating disinformation has never been stronger. This annual report encapsulates our collective efforts and the significant strides we have made in enhancing the media landscape in Georgia.

2023 has been a transformative year for "Media Voice," marked by significant achievements in media freedom advocacy, training, and international collaborations. Our mission to support independent journalism and combat disinformation has been reflected in our diverse activities and projects. Throughout the year, we have undertaken pivotal research, extensive training, and impactful advocacy to address the challenges faced by our media community. Our study on the media environment, highlighting the threats and supportive instruments in Georgia, has provided critical insights into the impact of political polarization and global crises. Additionally, our projects aimed at reducing self-censorship and promoting solidarity journalism have empowered journalists to uphold the principles of truth and integrity. Our study, "Russia's War in Ukraine and Solidarity of Georgian Media," implemented in cooperation with academia, highlighted the vital role of Georgian media in supporting Ukraine and resisting disinformation. It demonstrated how solidarity journalism can serve as a powerful tool in promoting collective resilience and empowering vulnerable groups amidst such authoritarian threats.

A significant milestone this year was joining the Media Freedom Coalition Consultative Network. This collaboration enhances our capacity to advocate for media freedom and fight disinformation on a global scale. Being part of this prestigious network allows us to work alongside renowned organizations, further strengthening our efforts to promote a free and vibrant media landscape in the South Caucasus and Black Sea regions.

However, 2023 has also brought substantial challenges. The increased threats from authoritarian governments and the imposition of restrictive laws, such as the "Russian law" targeting media freedom, have posed significant obstacles. These measures have exacerbated the risks for journalists, making our mission more critical than ever.

I extend my deepest appreciation to our dedicated team, our partners, and the many individuals who have contributed to our success. As we move forward, let us continue to champion the cause of a free and vibrant press, ensuring that the voices of journalists are heard and that democracy is strengthened through our collective efforts. Together, we can create a media environment that truly reflects the values of transparency, resilience, and solidarity.

Thank you for your continued support and dedication to our mission.

Warm regards,
Mariam Gersamia
Founder, Media Voice

Research and Publications

“Media Voice” released the study of the media environment 2022

On January 26, 2023 “Media Voice” presented a study entitled “Media Environment 2022: Threats and Supportive Instruments in Georgia” to representatives of media, civil society and academia. The event launched with opening remarks by the Head of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom South Caucasus Office Katrin Bannach. Research findings and recommendations were presented by the authors prof. Mariam Gersamia and assoc. prof. Maia Toradze.



The research highlights the impact of political polarization and crises on media viability and the impact of global and local crises (including Russia’s war in Ukraine) on the media environment; focuses on the extent to which the safety of journalists is ensured in Georgia, how the investigation of crimes committed against journalists is conducted, and what is being done to end any impunity. Based on the challenges that have existed since previous years, the study analyzes the existing threats in relation to self-censorship and freedom of expression.

How media manage to maintain institutional viability (e.g., financial sustainability, content production, relationships with sources and access to information) is particularly important in the context of political polarization. In this process, the hindering and supporting mechanisms present in the media from the side of various actors are evaluated. The study includes an evaluation of solidarity journalism as a support mechanism through the lens of situations observed in 2022.

One of the main aspects of the research is the assessment of the challenges in the Georgian media environment as a result of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the humanitarian crisis that followed. In this regard, under the existing conditions of Russian propaganda, the possible mechanisms of the influence of disinformation and its reduction are analyzed. The direct connection of artificial polarization, as a propaganda mechanism, to the Russian hybrid war, which deliberately destroys the credibility of journalism as a profession, is highlighted.

The study covers topics as it follows:

- Impact of Russia's war in Ukraine on Georgian media environment; Political polarization as threat to media credibility;
- Russian hybrid war and polarization in Georgian media;
- "Legal pathways" of media harassment in Georgia (Arrest of founder of Mtavari TV channel; Changes in Law of Georgia in Broadcasting);
- Challenges to freedom of expression: access to sources;
- Impunity for crimes committed against journalists;
- Safety of journalists: physical and verbal violence; Microphone as trigger of aggression;
- Media viability and financial challenges;
- Institutionalization of solidarity and resilience of media environment.

see the full version of the study in English: <http://bit.ly/3WGUoez>

See study in Georgian: <http://bit.ly/3WGUoez>

See more: <https://www.mediavoice.ge/post/media-voice-released-the-study-of-the-media-environment-2022>



**FRIEDRICH NAUMANN
FOUNDATION** For Freedom.

South Caucasus

Study Release: "Russia's War in Ukraine and Solidarity of Georgian Media"

Study "Russia's War in Ukraine and Solidarity of Georgian Media" has been released. Authors are: Mariam Gersamia, Ekatherine Gigauri, Salome Mamasakhlisi, Mikheil Bodokia & Mariam Nakoevi. This significant work emerged as part of an internship credit-course at "Media Voice," ("Media psychology and Communications" program) under the guidance of Prof. Mariam Gersamia, the founder of Media Voice. The presentation of the study was held on June 5 At Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University. The presentation was attended by students, professors and invited guests.



The study shows what pro-social mechanisms of the media are activated by the war, and how the Georgian media agenda changed after the start of the Russia's war in Ukraine. The research revealed the characteristics of solidarity in the Georgian media, the frequency of their use, the primary sources, and the differences and common characteristics between different media outlets in demonstrating support for Ukraine. The study identified indicators of solidarity journalism that appear in the media as a supportive mechanism during war communications. We can consider these media features as resources for enhancing collective stress resilience, viewer inclusion and empowerment of vulnerable groups. During the study period, solidarity indicators determined the media agenda and framing and activated the discourse created by the pro-social media. Demonstration of prosocial behaviours in this regard was observed in all studied television channels.

"Media Voice" thanks the students/interns of Tbilisi State University for their contribution in data collection. See the full version of the study on the "Media Voice" website: <http://bit.ly/3EB8fwr>

Summit for Democracy: Media Freedom Cohort Findings released

As part of the #Summit4Democracy 2023, the US State Department has released the Democracy Cohort reports. One of these reports is the Media Freedom Cohort Report, in which over 100 governments, non-governmental and media organizations, and corporations worldwide have agreed to a coordinated commitment to protect media freedom. Out of all the organizations involved in the Media Freedom Cohort working groups to prepare the report, "Media Voice" was the only organization from Georgia. To support independent media, the Media Freedom Cohort has established an unprecedented network of global partnerships within the framework of the Democracy Summit. The Media Freedom Cohort prepared a report on three priority areas within the framework of the Democracy Summit: protection of the safety of journalists, protection of freedom of expression, and strengthening of independent and diverse media.

"Media Voice" actively collaborates with the Media Freedom Coalition and works alongside a global network of media organizations to improve the media environment.

Projects and Activities

More Freedom and Less Self-Censorship, from Marneuli

The workshop and solidarity meeting discussion of the project "more freedom and less self-censorship" was held on January 28 in Marneuli, at the Center for Democratic Engagement. The meeting, was attended by journalists, students, local civil activists, and non-governmental sector representatives.



The goal of the "Media Voice" project is to support freedom of speech by strengthening the vitality of the media and creating a supportive media environment and in addition, strengthening the capacity of media workers to combat self-censorship and fear. Topics of the trainings are as follows: Media and self-censorship, freedom of speech, human rights and the media, solidarity journalism. Sessions were devoted to issues of self-censorship and freedom of expression, the specifics of international law and human rights coverage, solidarity journalism, and accurate coverage of vulnerable groups.

The project "More freedom, less self-censorship in the media" is implemented with the support of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Georgia. The goal of the project is to support freedom of expression by strengthening the vitality of the media and creating a supportive media environment. Also, strengthens the capacity of media workers to deal with self-censorship and fear. The topics of the training are media and self-censorship, freedom of expression, human rights and media, solidarity journalism.

The main partners of the "Mediavoice" project are the Institute of International Law of TSU (Jean Monet Chair / UEUPE), the University of Georgia and online platform "Publica". Supported by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, this project aimed to bolster media freedom and reduce self-censorship. Total support for 2022 and 2023 (till march) was 194, 701 Gel.



Kingdom of the Netherlands

Children Are Not Born With Prejudices

"Media Voice" Solidarity Journalism Trainings for Journalists and Students

"Children Are Not Born with Prejudices!" - this is a Swedish project, within the framework of which the film was screened at Tbilisi State University, at Grigol Robakidze University, at Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University and in Kutaisi Democratic Engagement Center. The project aims to change the stereotyped thinking, vision, and attitude toward people with disabilities.

On this day, 20 students from different universities of Georgia attended the movie screening of „The Importance of Tying your own Shoes” followed by a discussion and training.



The film (2011) is based on the real story of the creation of the Glady Hudik Theater with the participation of typical and disabled actors. Discussion was followed by training for media school students about "What should we know about media coverage of people with disabilities?".

Training was conducted by the "Media Voice" Executive Director Teona Tskhomelidze (director of Radio "Commersant"). The meeting with the students was attended by special guest Tatia Datashvili, who shared her experience with future journalists.

At the end of the training, the participants were awarded certificates.

The project Children Are Not Born With Prejudices is implemented by Glada Hudik-teatern («Teatr Glady Hudik»), financed by the The Swedish Institute. Total support was 4,000 Euros. Our Special thanks to Anuki Sturua, Glada Hudik-teatern, Par Johansson, Svenska institutet and Embassy of Sweden in Tbilisi.



"History Keepers 2023" has started in Georgia and Ukraine.



"History Keepers" is making strides on a regional scale, focusing on Georgia and Ukraine. This project is dedicated to fortifying the resilience of democratic values in Georgian and Ukrainian media and civic organizations while combating disinformation that targets specific topics of history and vulnerable communities.

In 2023, "Media Voice" partners include TV Formula and the program "Droeba" (Georgia) Tbilisi State University (Georgia), the Educational and Scientific Institute of International Relations, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (Ukraine), Totem – Center of Cultural Development in Ukraine, and the Solidarity Foundation "Nantius" (Georgia).

The project's activities for 2023 are as follows:

- July: Georgian Journalists Rati Mujiri and cameraman Giorgi Japaridze from Formula TV's program "Droeba" visited Ukraine in cooperation with partner organization TOTEM to produce a documentary about "History Keepers" in Georgia and Ukraine.
- September-December: Academic blogs will be published in Georgian and Ukrainian languages with the aim of reducing disinformation on specific topics.
- October-December: Seminars for journalists and youth will be conducted by EaP Fellows, including Mariam Gersamia, Sandro Megrelshvili, and Olena Afanasieva, in both Georgia and Ukraine.
- September – December: A contest and awarding ceremony for "History Keepers" will be conducted, selecting and honoring 15 Georgian and Ukrainian journalists and civic activists.

Europe Day with "History Keepers"



"Media Voice" celebrated Europe Day on May 6, in frame of the EU funded project "History Keepers". Ambassador of the European Union to Georgia Pawel Herczynski visited Expo Georgia, where "Media Voice" discussions host the following speakers:

- Teona Tskhomelidze, "Media Voice" executive director, "History Keeper"; topic: disinformation and technologies in a modern era;
- Sidonia Nun, artist and human rights defender, "History Keeper"; topic: Facing tomorrow in Ukraine and Georgia;
- Mariam Gersamia, "Media Voice" founder, professor (TSU), media program manager at Transparency International Georgia; topic: Effect of media, disinformation and conspiracy theories;
- Maia Toradze, "Media Voice" chairwoman, associated professor (TSU), topic: why solidarity journalism?

This project is funded by the European Union as part of its Eastern Partnership Civil Society Fellowship Programme, EaP Fellow is Mariam Gersamia (founder of media Voice).

Webinar "Resilience and Solidarity for Peace and Security" was held

The joint webinar was held on November 9, 2023, titled "Resilience and Solidarity for Peace and Security." This engaging event took place at the [The University Of Georgia](#) and was accessible online via our YouTube Channel and the Zoom platform, in collaboration with Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Institute of International Relations.

Organized as part of the History Keepers' regional project, a collaborative initiative between Georgian and Ukrainian EaP Civil Society Fellows, generously funded by the European Union through the [Eastern Partnership Civil Society Fellowship](#) program, the event was a resounding success. The event kicked off with a warm welcome from Mariam Gersamia, a distinguished professor at Tbilisi State University, founder of "Media Voice," and an EaP Fellow.

We were honored to have Yvonne Gogoll, International Aid / Cooperation Manager at the Directorate-General for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) of the European Commission, as our special guest, sharing invaluable insights. The opening remarks from Yvonne Gogoll was followed by Sandro Megrelishvili, an EaP Fellow, began with his presentation on "War in Ukraine: Future of Democracy and Freedom at Stake." Listen to our guests here.

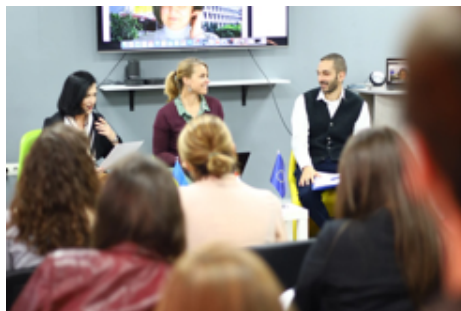
Adding an international perspective to the opening session, Olena Shevchenko, an Associated Professor at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv and a recipient of the "History Keeper's" award in 2022, joined us online. Olena Afanasieva, another EaP Fellow, illuminated us with her insights on "History Keepers in Ukraine: Synergy of Media and Archaeology in Countering Historical Fakes of Russia."

Prof. Olena Shevchenko then delved into "Media Regulations During Wartime and Building Resilience," while Mariam Gersamia wrapped up the panel with her exploration of "The Role of Solidarity Journalism During Wartime and Countering Disinformation."

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the approximately 40 students, media professionals, civil society representatives, and academics from both Georgia and Ukraine who joined us for this insightful discussion. During these illuminating conversations, we highlighted the importance of granting Georgia Candidacy status within the European Union as a pivotal step toward fostering resilience and strengthening democracy in the region.

🕒 Watch the full webinar [here](#) and subscribe to [Media Voice Channel](#).

We are thrilled to share the insights and feedback from the webinar. Our participants, including students, expressed their thoughts and [reflections](#) on this impactful event.



The gathering held special significance for Georgia, as the day before, on November 8, the European Commission recommended granting Georgia candidate status—an initial stride towards a significant victory. A Ukrainian student posed a sensitive question, prompting reflection on whether we feel the omnipresence of Russia as an occupier, even if not on a daily basis. This question triggered deep introspection, prompting a mental reel of my life—recalling the steps taken, the streets of Tbilisi, border checkpoints, and barbed wire. The answer crystallized in my mind: Russia was, is, and must soon cease being the occupier for the betterment of Georgia, Ukraine, and the entire world.

In closing, we want to extend our heartfelt appreciation to everyone who made this webinar a resounding success. A special thanks to our esteemed speakers, our distinguished guests, the dedicated organizers, our invaluable partners, and the the European Union through the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Fellowship program for generous support.

'The event was organised within the History Keepers regional project, a joint initiative of Georgian and Ukrainian EaP Civil Society Fellows. The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Fellowship programme is funded by the European Union'. Total amount of fellowship for implementing these activates to EaP Fellow Mariam Gersamia in 2023 was 8,000 Euros.

“Media Voice” joins the Media Freedom Coalition!



On September 11, Media Voice has officially become a member of the Media Freedom Coalition Consultative Network. The Coalition brings together renowned organizations, including ARTICLE 19, Public Media Alliance, Committee to Protect Journalists, DW Akademie, Reporters Without Borders, Media Action Nepal (MAN), Association for International Broadcasting, Committee to Protect Journalists, International Federation of Journalists, International Media Support, International Press Institute, Internews, The Guardian, Free Press Unlimited (FPU) and many others, all united by a shared commitment to preserving and promoting media freedom. Together, we form a formidable force in advocating for a free and vibrant media landscape.

Founded in 2015 by prof. Mariam Gersamia, Media Voice has been advocating media freedom, fostering independent journalism, and highlighting the critical role of a free press in democratic societies. Media Voice started its collaboration with the Media Freedom Coalition in 2022, marking the beginning of a powerful partnership for media freedom.

“Together with its fellow coalition members, Media Voice will continue to champion transparency, combat disinformation, and ensure that the voices of journalists are heard far and wide. Together, we will work hand in hand with the Coalition for Media Freedom to make a positive difference in safeguarding media freedom worldwide” – says the founder of the Media Voice and currently Media Program manager at Transparency international Georgia.

“Media Voice's unique strength lies in its dedicated focus on the South Caucasus and Black Sea regions. This strategic emphasis recognizes the specific challenges and opportunities in these areas and underscores the importance of amplifying media voices from this region on the global stage”- says Executive Director of Media Voice Teona Tskhomelidze.

About the Media Freedom Coalition: coalition is a global alliance of countries, organizations, and individuals committed to promoting media freedom, defending the rights of journalists, and ensuring the vitality of a free press. With members from 50 countries spanning six continents, the coalition engages in advocacy, diplomatic interventions, legal reforms, events, and funding to preserve and expand media freedom worldwide.

Advocacy and Campaigns

Opposition to the "Russian Bill" "Media Voice" joined civil society organizations in opposing a proposed bill that threatened media freedom. Our advocacy emphasized the bill's potential to undermine democratic values and EU aspirations for Georgia.

RUSSIAN LAW IS NOT THE WILL OF GEORGIA!



"Media Voice" joins the statement of the people of Georgia and organizations!

We, the people of Georgia, strongly oppose the bill initiated by the members of the Parliamentary Majority, also endorsed by the Speaker of Parliament and other MPs. We declare that the attempts to adopt this Russian bill attack not only the independent civil society organizations and the critical media, but the people of Georgia themselves.

This bill aims to leave defenseless the abused children and women; people with disabilities, minorities, scientists, workers, and the youth; to not provide assistance to the socially vulnerable families, farmers, miners, internally displaced, homeless, illegally laid off, detained, and other people fighting for their rights; to mute the voice of the people living in the peripheries of the country that can only communicate their troubles through the independent media. This draft legislation acts as a response to the numerous facts of violence, corruption, lawlessness, and arbitrary execution of the laws that we, the civil society and the critical media, study and make public.

When Putin adopted a similar law in Russia, many organizations chose to disband rather than comply with its requirements. Those that continued to operate faced increased control, harassment, and repressions. This is not the type of governance that we have fought for many years to achieve, and Russian law is certainly not the type of governance that Georgian citizens aspire to have in our country.

Adopting this bill will amount to an attack on the key Georgian values of dignity, independence and solidarity with our communities and fellow people. Adopting this bill will amount to an onslaught not only against civil society and our democracy but will also damage our aspirations of Euro-Atlantic development. This law will obstruct our path to membership of the EU as this law was found illegal in the EU. Moreover, the execution of this law will be impossible without causing insurmountable harm to hundreds of thousands of citizens of Georgia.

Statement signed by up to 300 organizations.

About the Center

Media and Communication Educational and Research Center “media Voice” was founded in 2015.

The center aims to support the enhancement of a media and mass-communication field in the manner of creation of the new knowledge and through educational-research activities, raise awareness in media literacy and support introduction and strengthening democratic values in a civil society. The center aims advising in the fields of media psychology, public relations, media and mass-communication, media law, support to transfer interdisciplinary knowledge. Center collaborates with higher educational institutions, local and international organizations, companies, educational and research centers. In January, 2023, the organization underwent a name modification, incorporating name Media Voice into its identity. It now operates under the abbreviation MCERC and/or Media Voice.



We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the photographers and artists whose captivating visuals have enriched this report, and their credits are duly acknowledged alongside their contributions: Lisa Glonti, Merab Galashvili, Tika Kharashvili and Guranda Benidze.

For more information:

website: www.mediavoice.ge

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/mediavoice.ge>

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/mediavoice_georgia/

linkedIn: <https://bit.ly/45ev4kA>

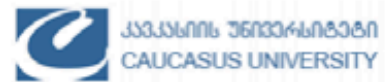
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Our partners



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