

NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT

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**Needs Assessment and Elaboration of
documentation for EU assistance
to the Georgian Public Broadcaster**

Lot N° 3: Telecommunications and Information Technologies

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Needs Assessment Report

**A background document prepared by Marek Bekerman
on Behalf of Danish Management A/S**

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1. Introduction

The present analysis of the state of affairs at GPB, its capacity levels in various areas, and the identification of the most urgent issues to address are based on a series of meetings and interviews conducted both inside and outside the organisation between 5th and 20th September (see Annex 1 for the schedule of meetings). Some of the meetings were conducted jointly with the Team Leader of the European Broadcasting Union mission, Boris Bergant, whose insight and expertise have greatly informed the present work.

Special thanks are due to the GPB Head of Administration, Maya Bichikashvili, who organised most of the meetings and interviews, including those at senior and government level, and who suggested herself interviewees, organisations and institutions to consult. Her presence at most meetings greatly enhanced their effectiveness, and her professionalism contributed to the openness and a spirit of cordiality during interviews. Thanks to that, many uncomfortable questions could be asked without causing offence or tension, and many valuable answers received. Gratitude should also be expressed to virtually all staff at GPB, who made themselves freely available for interviews even at very busy times and were ready to rearrange their schedules to accommodate further meetings and conversations.

For reasons of clarity and simplicity, the assessment has been split into four areas: GPB as an **organisation** (Section 3.1.) – to examine its institutional capacity, GPB as a **broadcaster** (Section 3.2.) – to see how it performs its stated mission, GPB as a **business** (Section 3.3.) – to analyse its actions as a player in the TV and radio sector, and the fourth: **people at GPB** (Section 3.4.). The purpose is not to focus on the current constraints and limitations enfeebling GPB internally and externally, but to take it as a departure point for a vision of the organisation's future, and the necessary steps to achieve it. All too frequently, during the interviews, phrases like: "It won't work," "It is impossible", "It will never happen" were heard, and only infrequently would staff say "We can do that...", "Let's try this...", "Why not...?" and "How about...?" or "We should", suggesting a strong sense of disempowerment. Apart from the vague and non-specific formulations in the Broadcasting Law of what the GPB is supposed to, there is no vision for the organisation, or a strategy statement reflecting the aspirations and dreams of its highly motivated staff.

The present Needs Assessment has also drawn on previous work in this area for the Georgian Public Broadcaster reflected in a number of documents available, including the BBC World Service Trust report from October 2008, or the Canal France International document from December 2009. In the absence of comprehensive data reflecting wider public needs and expectations from GPB, the present Assessment extrapolates from the existing available surveys and audience research, the experience of other countries, and from the best practice of other public broadcasters in the belief that certain processes and standards tend to be universal. The assumptions and risks factored into the present research have been overwhelmingly validated during most of the meetings conducted and interviews held, and consequently, it is hoped that the recommendations and suggestions arrived at will reflect – even if partly speculatively – the needs and aspirations of the wider Georgian public.

2. The Context

2.1. Political context

Georgia is striving to regain stability and recreate an environment for economic growth and development after a long period of intense political tension resulting from the Russian-Georgian conflict in August 2008. The country emerged strongly polarised from the war. The political tension has now been largely defused but at a cost of the government and the President being accused of authoritarianism and betrayal of democratic values by the opposition. The international community has also watched the post-war political scene in Georgia with growing concern. A long season of parliamentary, presidential and local elections planned for 2012, 2013 and 2014 is aimed at refreshing the political field and clearing the tables with the view to making a fresh start for the country.

2.2. Socioeconomic context

The short war with Russia in August 2008 has weighed heavily on Georgia's aspirations to move quickly towards sustained economic growth leading to eventual prosperity. It has also been a setback in its march towards achieving a set of Western values and developing democratic, modern society. Figures suggest that Georgia has re-entered a period of consistent economic growth, but this time it is accompanied by a growing sense of social exclusion of a large section of society from its benefits. The talk on the streets is that only the narrow elites aligned to the government reap the rewards, while the rest of the nation has limited access to what democracy and an open, more competitive market can offer. At the same time, the majority admit that they value stability, law and order, and the administrative and infrastructural modernisation introduced by the present administration, which has made their lives a lot easier.

2.3. Media environment

The Georgian political scene and recent battles between the opposition and the governing party are closely reflected in the media landscape, particularly in television, which remains the dominant medium in the country. According to the latest surveys conducted by Caucasus Research and Resource Centres (CRRC), almost 90% of the Georgian population relies on television – and television mainly – as a source of information. It is true that the Internet use for this purpose has recently doubled in urban centres, but it is estimated that it will take years in Georgia for Internet news provision to compete with television. In rural areas, TV is often the only source, with many people across the social spectrum admitting in surveys that they no longer own a radio receiver at home¹.

Georgia has been scoring quite well in international indexes measuring media freedom, although it slipped down in ratings since the early years of the Rose Revolution². Most observers stress, however, that the relative freedom of the media in Georgia does not work equally across the board. Quite clearly, the Internet is the medium with fewest, if any, constraints, while the press represents a full spectrum of views and opinion, even though it is

¹ CRRC report “2009 and 2011 Opinion on Georgian Media Frequency Charts”, part R

² Transparency International Georgia, “Television in Georgia: Ownership, Control and Regulation”, November 2009, p. 3.

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not entirely free from government pressure, or intimidation of journalists. But the Internet penetration is still low in Georgia, and is territorially limited.

When it comes to the printed press, the picture is not much better, with newspaper prices often too high for ordinary people, which results in very low circulations of even the most successful publications. For example, the most popular Georgian weekly, Kviris Palitra, has a print run of about 50,000 in the country of more than 5 million people. Some newspaper circulations do not even reach a thousand copies, and are more akin to pamphlets and brochures in terms of their impact³.

Radio in Georgia has followed the fate of the medium in many other post-Soviet countries, opting for music and trivia, and giving up on any serious informational content. Speech-based models, requiring an editorial process or more complex production effort, have been abandoned by most. Recent surveys of radio listening habits among Georgians suggest that they discount radio stations as providers of most recent and reliable information and prefer to refer back to television news for that purpose⁴.

But according to a Transparency International report on Georgian TV ownership, control and regulation going back to November 2009, the provision of information on television in Georgia is limited:

“The three major channels are reluctant to air shows that would provide a platform for factual and informative debates between members of the administration, the ruling United National Movement party and opposition politicians. The national newscasts aired by Rustavi 2, Imedi and the Public Broadcaster's Channel 1 are pretty much identical and there are indications that newscasts are coordinated”⁵

Rustavi 2 and Imedi are privately owned commercial TV channels, with a combined audience share of nearly 60 percent. They are widely considered to be pro-government, and believed to be owned or controlled by people close to it. The Georgian Public Broadcaster, GPB, with its two television channels and a public service mandate is also considered to favour the government line. Its audience share is estimated at anything between 5 and 8%, leaving the rest to a plethora of smaller and marginal TV stations, several of which are owned or controlled by opposition⁶. Their actual ratings figures cannot be relied on, as some of them would fall within what is considered statistical error in some audience research methodologies.

2.4. Public Service Broadcaster (GPB) – basic facts and figures

Georgian Public Broadcasting (GPB) consists of three television channels and two radio stations, but is popularly identified with TV Channel 1. The generalist 1st Channel scores as number three in terms of viewing figures, but lags well behind its two commercial rivals, Rustavi2 and Imedi. The 2nd GPB channel, increasingly referred to as the parliamentary

³ Figures supplied by IREX Media Sustainability Index and European Journalism Centre. Official circulation statistics are not available, with many newspapers preferring not to disclose such figures.

⁴ CRRC report “2009 and 2011 Opinion on Georgian Media Frequency Charts”, part G.

⁵ Transparency International Georgia, “Television in Georgia: Ownership, Control and Regulation”, November 2009, p. 4.

⁶ According to figures supplied by AGB Nielsen Media Research in Georgia.

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channel, is still not fully developed and operational, and there are no firm decisions about its future shape or direction. The same uncertain fate is shared by the 3rd Russian-language channel, referred to as PIK (based on its Russian-language acronym), which was re-launched in 2010 as an external service to counterbalance the Russian media influence in the region in the aftermath of the Russian-Georgian war of August 2008.

There are two GPB FM radio stations, with FM102.4 mirroring the generalist nature of TV 1st Channel, and the FM100.9 playing mostly music, and sometimes inserting some speech-based content. The on-line presence of GPB as a media content provider is in its infancy, and does not feature highly in programme priorities.

GPB is a mixture of old and new. It metamorphosed into a public service broadcaster as recently as 2004 from being a state broadcaster going back to 1925 as a radio station and to 1953 as a television channel. It is considered to be a baby of the Rose Revolution in Georgia, which took place in 2003. The Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Levan Gakheladze, says that prior to that it was widely resented and identified with the previous corrupt regime.

Today's image of GPB has not been helped by a series of recent events, such as the period of the state of emergency introduced by President Mikhail Saakashvili in November 2007, and his subsequent re-election as President in January 2008. At that time, GPB was accused of failing to report important events related to the opposition parties. This was followed by a complete clean-out and replacement of the Board of Trustees and top management, and a re-launch of the 1st channel. The political tension around GPB continued well into 2010, leading to legislative changes, deals with the opposition, an enlargement of the Board of Trustees by a few oppositional personalities, and yet another changes at the top.

According to GPB management, the broadcaster's signal is received in most of the country, including remote rural areas, with very few "black spots" such as southern Javakheti. It provides minority language programming in Russian, Armenian and Azeri (it has now also been obliged to broadcast in Abkhazian and Ossetian), although the frequency of such broadcasts and their content is quite limited.

The Georgian public service broadcaster is funded from the state coffers by an annual allocation of 0.12% of the overall budget with a ring fencing proviso that any possible decreases in subsequent year budgets would not trigger a proportional decrease in the allocations compared to a previous year. The public funds grant for the year 2012 has been calculated at 28.2 million lari (GEL) or about 12.3 million euro. For comparison, the initial allocation at the start of GPB operation as a public service broadcaster in 2005 was about 20 million lari. The organisation is permitted by law to generate commercial income, although there are quite many limitations and conditions attached to such areas as advertising or sponsorship.

GPB currently employs about 930 people at its two TV channels and the two radio stations, with an estimated 350 more staff working for the external-service Russian language channel, PIK, which is managed by an outside commercial company. There is high fluctuation of the workforce, and salary levels are considered low. Only about 5% of staff is on continuing, or permanent contracts – mostly people in senior positions – while the rest are employed on short-term contracts.

2.5. Legal and regulatory environment

2.5.1. Broadcasting Law (2004)

The functioning of GPB as a public service broadcaster is regulated by Broadcasting Law adopted by the Georgian Parliament in 2004, with subsequent amendments. Chapter III of the Law obliges GPB to fulfil its duties in the spirit of the legislation passed in many of the European Union states on public broadcasting. Among other things, it requires GPB:

- To be editorially independent, fair and impartial
- To be free from political, religious and commercial influence
- To maintain programming balance in its scheduling to cover all types of content, including news and current affairs, politics, social issues, culture, art, educational and children's programmes, sport and entertainment
- To provide prompt and professional news coverage of events in Georgia, including regional news, and international news
- To be pluralistic and unbiased, reflect multicultural and multiethnic nature of Georgian society, and to refrain from opinionating
- To outsource at least one quarter of its output
- To support and promote Georgian national, spiritual and cultural values and diversity

The law specifies a grievance procedure available to GPB in cases of violations of its editorial independence by government or other interference. It includes referral to the country's broadcasting commission, GNCC, or a court application. It names the Board of Trustees as the main governing and regulatory body inside the organisation, and defines its roles and responsibilities. It also names Director General as the other management body, leaving the rest of the structure to be determined internally by GPB.

The Board of Trustees consists of 15 members, chosen by a parliamentary vote out of a group of candidates selected by the President of Georgia. The selection is made out of a general pool of publically nominated candidates. The term of a trustee is 6 years, and the Law requires one-third of the members to be rotated every two years.

Broadcasting Law also establishes a broadcasting fee pegged to a taxpayer's status as a legal form of funding for the Public Broadcaster, but within the same article it makes a provision which hibernates the enforcement of the broadcasting fee until an unspecified later date. In its place, the provision makes an allocation of 0.12% of the previous year's state budget as a source of funding for GPB.

Among the articles applying to all broadcasters within the body of the law, there are paragraphs specifically referring to the public broadcaster, such as limitations in its

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commercial activities and in collecting advertising revenues. One of the latest amendments in this area is prohibition of all commercial advertising by the public broadcaster, with the exception of sports programmes.

2.5.2. Code of Conduct for Broadcasters (2009)

The Georgian National Communications Commission, GNCC, which among other things issues broadcast licenses, was required by law to pass a Code of Conduct for Broadcasters, setting in motion regulatory and self-regulatory mechanisms, and establishing complaints and appeals procedures. The Code was drafted with the help of experts from the Council of Europe and passed in 2009. It applies to all broadcasters in Georgia, including GPB.

The Georgian Code of Conduct for Broadcasters sets out broadcasting principles related to its content among other things requiring licensees to:

- Ensure impartiality and accuracy of information, freedom of speech and expression
- Safeguard the professional freedom of journalists and operate within the framework of editorial independence and public accountability
- Accommodate interests of various social groups regardless of their political affiliation, cultural, ethnic, religious and regional backgrounds, language, age or gender
- Respect individuals' right to privacy, balancing the public interest in freedom of expression

The Code also distinguishes principles applying to different types of programming, such as news and current affairs, content for minors, and different broadcasting contexts, such as election periods, or the time of armed conflicts and emergencies.

2.5.3. GPB Internal Code of Conduct

The Georgian Public Broadcaster has adopted its own, additional in-house code of conduct for staff journalists, editors and producers setting professional standards and principles of journalism ethics. It is a comprehensive document, far more detailed than the Code of Conduct for Broadcasters, prepared with the assistance of BBC consultants, and drawing heavily on BBC Producer's Guidelines. Its function is similar to that of the Associated Press Stylebook, and other internal manuals or reference handbooks issued by major media organisations.

2.5.4. News and Current Affairs (Moambe) Guidelines

On top of the legislative and self-regulatory principles and codes summarised above, the News and Current Affairs unit of the GPB 1st Channel, Moambe, has elaborated its own guidelines, defining in more detail production and editorial procedures within the department. Moambe staff is required to follow all the above documents at work.

2.6. Outside assistance to GPB

There has been widespread involvement of international organisations and agencies in the development of the media in Georgia in the last decade, but the country's public broadcaster has enjoyed relatively less attention. This was possibly because of an assumption that its stable source of funding from the state budget made it less needy than many other start-ups and applicants queuing for international donor money.

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The intended big bang associated with transforming the state broadcaster into a public service one did not really happen. The newly rebranded broadcaster failed to capture the public's viewing. Audience figures fell to the point of being negligible, until the war with Russia in August 2008, which reversed the trend⁷. At the invitation of the European Union, consultants from the BBC conducted a Needs Assessment mission in October 2008 saying;

*"We do not want BBC trainers to come and remedy shortcomings at GPB only for us to find that the problem preventing the station from gaining public trust lies elsewhere, such as in a latent mechanism that allows outside forces to exert control. We explained that we have a duty to protect the BBC's reputation. The BBC does not want to be accused of propping up an organisation that purports to uphold public broadcasting values but is in fact state broadcasting in disguise."*⁸

The subsequent series of training activities funded by the European Union and focusing on the editorial integrity and standards in news and current affairs at GPB was delivered by BBC World Service Trust experts until March 2010. The Head of News at GPB, Khatuna Berdzenishvili, says the training had considerable impact on the news and current affairs (Moambe) output in the first place, and brought about an increase in audience figures.

This was followed by another intervention involving UNDP and the BBC, again funded by the EU. The "Development of Media Monitoring capacities in Georgia" programme was aimed at building the capacity of GPB for professional media coverage. Its delivery started in April 2010 and is now coming to an end.

In December 2009 and in February 2010, experts from Canal France International came to assess the institutional capacity of each of the three TV channels with emphasis on the 2nd channel and with the view to restructuring it into a parliamentary channel. These short-term missions have resulted in assessment reports but no concrete results.

A number of international agencies have sponsored or provided funds for specific programmes or activities at GPB. For example, Konrad Adenauer Foundation has contributed financially to the production of the TV show "European Time", while the British Embassy funded training for GPB staff in the run-up to a launch of a political talk-show "Public Politics". The Swiss Agency for development and Co-operation (SDC) has funded a TV programme for farmers, and the Eurasia Partnership Foundation has provided a grant to create and run a joint TV and radio project "European Time" on EU integration issues.

A comprehensive mission from the European Broadcasters Union is currently involved in assessing the structural and institutional health of GPB with the view to producing a strategy paper for the organisation for the next 3-4 years. The EBU mission is also looking into such issues as the impact of digitisation on GPB, and the implications of the planned relocation to new premises.

There has been no comprehensive, longer-term assistance programme to the Georgian public broadcaster to date. It is strongly believed that such assistance is both timely and necessary, despite numerous risks and limitations faced by GPB.

⁷ According to figures supplied by AGB Nielsen Media Research in Georgia.

⁸ BBC World Service Trust "Georgian Public Broadcasting Training Needs Assessment", October 2008, p.10.

3. Assessment of GPB

3.1. GPB as an organisation

“It is a shame that the transformation of the organisation from state broadcaster to a public service broadcaster in Georgia has only taken place on paper and not in reality.” (A visiting EBU representative)

This is perhaps a harsh view which could easily be countered by quoting numerous changes that have been taking place at GPB since its launch as a public service broadcaster, including the renewal of the Board of Trustees, and new faces at the top. The structure of the organisation has been changed, and there is ongoing process of making even more changes in the organisational chart. And this is the paradox at GPB that seems to defy comprehension: with so many changes around that create a sense of the organisation being in a state of permanent flux, why is it that so many people around it say that nothing has changed there, and everything remains the same?

Only one entry can be found on the organisation’s website under the heading “Management”: a bio note of its Director General. When you talk to people in the organisation, and equally outside, and mention the Board of Trustees, they will only talk about its Chairman, and only occasionally will you hear names of other Board members, usually in the context of discussing the decreasing minority of those representing alternative points of view.

Trying to decipher who does what at GPB is a very difficult task. Power is concentrated at the top and rationed in a minimalist fashion as you descend down. Examining the organisational chart of GPB gives an impression of a strictly topographic representation, providing information who “sits” where in the organisation, but very little about who does what in relation to programmes or processes at GPB. It is a static and mechanical picture, giving no insight into processes at work there, or the nature of relationships among constituent parts. Even more worryingly, the chart fully reflects the vertical nature of the system, with a few “power” nodes at the top, very little in the middle, and a rather unstructured, list-like enumeration of specific departments sitting next to one another. The end result is that top management ends up trying to micromanage almost all elements of the present system.

The organisation chart does not really reflect its nature as a broadcaster: the fact that it is a programme-maker and a scheduler with an editorial policy. For example, the word “Editor” does not appear even once in the chart, while the ever-present term “producer” is overused to the point of being meaningless in reflecting the role or job description of a person in question.

This is pretty much exemplified by the job description obtained from the senior staff member, General Producer, Giorgi Gachechiladze, who commissions programmes (in consultation with a few other senior staff members), oversees their production and execution, procurement or acquisition, and later assesses how they work or sit in the schedule. In other words, he seems to be doing everything from the point of view of a programme-making broadcasting organisation. The classical division of a sustained programme-making process present in many serious broadcast outlets, namely into: 1) designing and commissioning

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programmes, 2) producing and editing actual programmes, and finally 3) editorially controlling their impact and effectiveness, is nowhere to be found at GPB.

A similar situation obtains in the News department, whose Head, Khatuna Berdzenishvili, is responsible for newsgathering, editorial shape of news and current affairs bulletins and programmes, for some running orders, and even for the actual production or execution of the flagship 2000 evening news bulletin. It is not clear whether anyone else at any time actually “edits” the news in the sense of asking and discussing the fundamental questions of what the main stories of the day are, why they are important to the public, how best they can be covered, or how to give wider context and deeper insight to them.

The search for the familiar constituents of the content-generating process in serious, professional broadcasting outlets, namely:

- Conceptualisation, design and commissioning of formats, programmes and series;
- Budgeting for, production, execution and recording or staging of programmes;
- Feedback, assessment, evaluation, editorial control and impact measurement of programmes

has brought the discovery that all these processes do take place, but in a largely informal setting of semi-spontaneous, often ad-hoc meetings and committees, again comprising the same familiar culprits: the top management. There is hardly any formalisation of the key processes that should be at play at GPB:

- the choice of what type of programmes to make, how to make them, and how much to pay for them;
- the tight, efficient and expert execution of specific programmes, series or seasons by a dedicated executive producer-editor tandem;
- the assessment, evaluation and editorial revision of the broadcaster’s outputs in conjunction with measuring audience impact and how the programmes in question work side by side with other programmes in a given schedule;

and if there is, it is not reflected in the organisational chart. Observing one of those meetings, there was no sense of a formalised time-controlled agenda, or a set of goals and objectives, let alone a system for reaching consensus and decision-taking.

During meetings and interviews for the present Assessment, adjectives describing how the organisation works, and the quality of the people working for it have been collected. The mismatch between them could not be more striking:

Organisation	People
chaotic, disorganised, short-term, ad-hoc, dependent, disoriented, mechanical, box-ticking, passive, inconsistent, indecisive, static, conservative, inward-looking, defensive, cautious, timid, marginal, self-	sophisticated, intelligent, creative, open, witty, critical, resolute, impulsive, curious, inquisitive, innovative, sociable, co-operative, communicative, argumentative, ambitious, flexible, tolerant

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3.1.1. Internal communications and infrastructure

GPB has no organisation-wide Intranet, or internal network to supply all members of staff with a standardised communication and connectivity capacity. Some departments have their own mini networks, but they do not communicate as part of any co-ordinated communication architecture. The head of the Technical Department, George Baratashvili, says that in order to create a proper Intranet system would require an investment in the area of 150,000 Euro. It would need new cabling, and other infrastructural changes at the premises, which go back several decades. Most interviewees have said that such an investment would be difficult to justify, as the organisation is due to relocate to another custom-built premises by 2014 or 2015.

Despite this deficiency, there is no sense that the internal communications capacity is insufficient. Internet access appears to be available at most workstations, and there is no sense of a shortage of office space. Observing communications styles of staff, whatever was missing in contemporary software and hardware, appeared to be compensated for with very efficient communication via mobile phones and e-mail. GPB has its website, which it uses to post internal documents on, and for other communication purposes. There does not seem to be an internal forum capacity for staff to discuss work internal issues, or exchange opinions.

The organisation operates in a tired building, which has seen better times, but again, because of the relocation prospect, no significant investment or refurbishing effort is foreseen. This seems to be the right approach, given the incessant needs of the broadcasting operations to renew studios and broadcasting equipment within what must be described as a modest budget for this size of operation. Several interviewees have complained that excessive resources go into periodic studio refurbishment for news, and the renewal of computers or software to the detriment of other departments, but this issue does not seem to be a source of controversy for the majority of staff.

In contrast to what it lacking in the area of programme needs and content generation, the technical side of operations at GPB is orderly and stable, giving impression of reliability and continuity. This is no mean feat, given the most recent history of Georgia, with electricity supply problems, unrest and political changes. There is no doubt that this a strong institutional side of the organisation, and all the concern and care expressed about ensuring proper technical and operational support for a successful continuation of GPB as a business and a broadcaster are clear evidence of commitment and loyalty of its staff and management.

There have been no signs of financial excesses, or bad husbandry in spending on technical or infrastructural projects. It is a very healthy sign that GPB management can expand its good practices to the broadcasting and business sphere really successfully. In fact, the technical and operational side is obviously the area, where the present management is most at ease, which begs the question whether additional training in editorial policy, and strategic management relating to media content and programming would not be the best tool to achieve that.

3.1.2. Separateness

Another striking aspect of the organisational structure at GPB is the discrete nature of its constituent parts. This time, the division is quite institutionalised and has an unwelcome effect on the interaction between channels and departments. Most staff – particularly at senior level – see their units as completely separate and independent from one another, and often do not perceive themselves as part of the same entity, working to the same mission statement and strategy, or common goals.

Because of the mechanical nature of the internal budgetary allocations within GPB, particular departments look at each other as consumers of the budget, and not as co-operative business units sharing the budget. There is no renegotiating mechanism for the budgetary splits, and the rough division of the little resentments among them is that of other departments being either “a complete waste of money”, or receiving “far too much money for the value they bring in”. Few can see that these quotes translate really into: “We all do not spend the limited resources in the best possible way”.

Even fewer venture further to see the obvious waste of resources caused by duplication of effort and infrastructure brought about by the mechanical approach of splitting the operations into totally separate entities. Occasional efforts to compensate for that with fake synergies like broadcasting TV audio signal on radio channels to save a little money on programming can only have an opposite effect on the audience: switching to other radio channels.

Case-study: PIK. An illustrative case in point is the 3rd, or PIK channel, the acronym for which translates from Russian as the First Informational Caucasian Channel. Because its satellite signal had been switched off – arguably for political reasons – by one provider, the channel was redesigned and re-launched in 2010 on a much grander scale in a remarkably short time with an injection of funds from the Georgian government budget. The channel broadcasts mostly news and current affairs content in a 24 hours format in Russian, and is seen by many as a counterbalancing act to the impact of the Russian media in the region.

The official line is that GPB management had requested a separate allocation from the government to boost the 3rd channel, but the common view is that it was really a presidential initiative after the growing discomfort that Georgia had largely failed to win the information war with Russia about the way the August 2008 conflict was being perceived in the West. Whatever the truth, the reality is that the politics around the launch of PIK triggered considerable resentment within GPB, whose staff at all levels hardly see it as its integral part. The fact that PIK’s start-up operation enjoyed ample funding, and was being managed by an ostensibly outside commercial company – but in fact by members of its own executive management – did not help win the hearts and minds of GPB employees, either. The differences between salary levels at PIK compared to those at the rest of GPB added insult to injury, creating a high level of animosity within what is – at least on paper – one and the same organisation.

PIK management and senior staff have created what appears to be an efficient, forward-looking and positively aggressive broadcasting operation based on a modern, multi-media platform, with robust provision of news and current affairs programmes, and an interactive on-line news component. In fact, it is the first news-driven TV channel operation of its kind in Georgia, with a capacity to broadcast a 24-hour news stream.

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And yet, the level of incorporation of the PIK channel as the integral part of GPB structures into its institutional body is nil. Its offices and studios are in a different building, rented from another commercial TV channel at relatively high cost, and there is virtually no managerial or editorial interaction, let alone a common editorial, or newsgathering platform.

PIK and the 1st Channel's news and current affairs operations have totally separate newsgathering teams and operations, with separate foreign bureaux and separate sets of reporters and correspondents, even though some of them are unquestionably bilingual in Georgian and Russian. In an accountable system this obvious duplication of effort, staff and resources would be next to impossible to justify before an autonomous Board of Trustees, and ultimately the Georgian taxpayer.

The cases of wasteful duplication abound in other areas, particularly in news and current affairs. The concept of **output sharing** and **reversioning** – a pretty universal tool in most multi-channel, and multi-language operations, does not exist. New programmatic formats and programme concepts brought in and developed at PIK, are not put under discussion, or considered worthy candidates for transfer over to other GPB outlets. In the context of GPB struggling to populate its schedules, particularly on its 2nd Channel, this highly uncooperative approach is truly incomprehensible. Both PIK, and 1st Channel have separate documentary film production units, and yet, no evidence of co-operation or sharing of output has been found.

There is no exchange of staff, or transfer of know-how and expertise, either. This is especially striking in the on-line news sphere, where GPB has yet to develop some kind of consistent, professional content provision, while PIK can claim quite a few operational successes. And yet, these and other successes are not shared, let alone celebrated. In fact, the two operations have acquired a strong competitive slant, but based on mutual hostility and exchange of criticism.

“We need and integrative and an integrated approach to our operations”, said one of the top managers at PIK in an interview for the present research. This view was shared by others, whose feeling of hurt and a sense of injustice was quite tangible.

“GPB cannot be successful and be treated seriously and with respect, if all channels do not share and support one another, instead of being constantly engaged in slanging matches and constant bickering”, was another quote at PIK. But back at the GPB headquarters, the talk is more in terms of future funding for PIK than in terms of common future or partnership. There is growing unease about plans at the top of the government to bring the channel properly back under the GPB umbrella, or merge it with regional TV channels in what appears to be an effort to save the government budget money.

The GPB management do not seem to see this as an opportunity to capitalise on the PIK achievements, and a chance to recapture a well-functioning outlet, but as a threat to its own budget. Nobody at GPB appeared to consider PIK an asset, and there was no talk about co-operation, sharing, or integration. . There were hardly any expressions of sympathy for, or solidarity with the colleagues at PIK facing uncertain or unsettled future

3.1.3. The fearful asymmetry

If the 3rd Channel (PIK) was able to do a complete turn-around within such a short period of

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time – about a year, while the rest of GPB has taken nearly 7 years to meander through a maze of superficial changes to where it is today, the obvious question is why is there such an asymmetry in the treatment of the two? And why such stark contrast in their performance? It seems that the answer mostly lies in the political conditioning around the two entities.

- PIK was re-launched at a time of political expediency after the 2008 war and enjoyed a hefty injection of start-up funds, free from the budget-approval limitations imposed on the rest of GPB;
- Its budget accountability was liberated from standard GPB procedures and tied to programming priorities, based on a strategy and specific milestones;
- Salary levels offered to production and editorial staff attracted more quality individuals, while in-house training capacity closed the skills and competency gaps;
- The management and executive editorial staff have enjoyed a high level of editorial autonomy and a fair degree of respect from the government. Consequently, they were able to develop their own editorial policy and standards.

It could be argued that PIK has been given so much freedom and enjoyed so much support because it is a propaganda tool against Russia, but this does not explain why its example could not be replicated by the rest of GPB.

3.1.4. Content maker or a scheduler

The current broadcast law of Georgia obligates the country's public broadcaster to outsource at least 25% of its output. The previous management of GPB was in favour of commissioning as much content as possible outside the organisation, and paying independent production houses and other content providers for programmes. The current philosophy is quite the opposite: to try and produce as much as possible in-house. Such pendulum swings are quite common to many media organisations in the age of multimedia and multichannel broadcasting, where cable and satellite networks have been sometimes making a lot of money for being essentially buyers and schedulers of content, while many content makers have struggled to cover the cost of ambitious, quality, and high-budget productions.

GPB is therefore not alone in trying to answer the question whether it sees itself essentially as a content maker and a broadcaster, or as a scheduler and broadcaster. But it may find it difficult to pursue the latter option, because:

- The current budget allocation is not sufficient for GPB even to consider multiplying its channel offer in the digital and multichannel era, while it struggles to populate its existing schedules on the 1st Channel, and clearly fails to populate its 2nd Channel;
- The current budget allocation does not allow GPB to buy even a limited number of quality programmes, or commission their production to be more competitive, or to attract audiences away from the channels with higher ratings.
- Despite assurances based on previous experience of outsourcing that programmes commissioned outside GPB are invariably of better quality, there is no strong evidence to suggest that the independent TV production industry in Georgia is robust enough to secure a steady stream of quality programmes. On the contrary, it looks like a number of such independent production enterprises are unstable

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constructs acting more like financial appendages to budget-funded organisations.

- Outsourcing must not be used to absolve GPB of its editorial responsibility and competence. Commissioning programmes outside will not reduce the editorial and managerial deficit in the organisation, and will only reinforce the perception that GPB is not a fully independent and autonomous institution.
- Investing in in-house production capacity can only strengthen GPB as a broadcaster, and reinforce the perception that it is different from other players on the market who rely on buying outside programmes and copying foreign formats.
- Increasing outsourcing would require liberating additional funds from other parts of the GPB budget – most probably through laying off more staff.

In the light of the above points, some suggestions to outsource, for example, all news output on the 1st Channel, may not do GPB any good, as such a move would remove the only clear proprietary element in the GPB schedule distinguishing it as a public broadcaster.

3.2. GPB as a broadcaster

GPB and its audience. A number of people, including GPB staff members, have said in private conversations that much of the GPB output is “unwatchable”. Many of those made a point of singling out the news and current affairs department, Moambe, as better than the rest, but immediately proceeded to criticise the content of the news bulletins and talk shows. The rest of the output was deemed unworthy even of criticism.

Some interviewees complained that the potential ability of some news programming at GPB to attract a wider audience is killed off by scheduling really poor quality output just before or after. The extent to which such internal and informal assessments are true is extremely difficult to judge, because there is very little calibrated and targeted audience research to verify them. Clearly, across the board judgments of this sort are unfair, because examples of interesting and engaging programming generated at GPB have been shown.

There is no doubt that the lack of proper, professionally designed and well resourced audience research and figures for particular programmes and programming strands, and reliance on anecdotal evidence or pure gossip is doing GPB a lot of damage. But there is limited understanding within the organisation of the importance of knowing audience needs and expectations, and little ability of translating such knowledge into captivating content. Here are some quotes harvested during interviews:

“GPB is not successful, because it is divorced from the audience and operates in a vacuum”

“GPB should not be ashamed of letting the public know about its problems – what challenges they face and what problems limit them”

“The main problem at GPB is the lack of trust of the public and lack of communication with the public”

“GPB does not listen and does not observe”

“The public service broadcaster needs to initiate and conduct a public debate about itself”.

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Other interviewees underscored the absence of a well articulated mission statement in the organisation which would guide it towards a programme-making and market-driven strategy. They said that setting GPB programme and scheduling priorities in terms of general priority areas like “educational programmes” or “political debates” is not enough, because such terms cannot possibly inform the content of programmes, or their quality.

The criticism of the mechanical approach to producing programmes based on such vaguely defined priority areas was terse. Interviewees pointed out disaffected presenters and anchors executing programmes in an uninspired way, and the reluctance to verify their popularity through audience research, surveys, or feedback.

Case Study One: 1st Channel’s News and Current Affairs (Moambe)

The output of the news and current affairs department at the 1st Channel is often showcased as an example how far GPB has travelled on the way to editorial independence, impartiality and balance. Two recurrent arguments put forward by GPB that this is indeed the case are that:

- Presidential news stories are rarely at the top of the bulletins, and sometimes there are no stories relating to presidential activities in the news bulletins running orders on a given day at all;
- In stories requiring balance, both sides of the argument are heard.

This is countered by the following criticism:

- On many days, presidential or governmental stories are still central to news bulletins, even if they are artificially dragged down the running order, with stories in front of, or after them acting as a “newsy” environment to enhance their topicality and cover up their propagandistic nature;
- The claim of balance is in fact a mechanical application of the principle of hearing both sides, with avoidance of controversial angles and debating on air. The argument goes on to say that usually the government side is treated gently, while the opposition is punched hard.

The focus of such rows distracts attention from a much more important question: the impact and the use of the perceived successes of Moambe on other programming and channels. If they are central to the claims of recent achievements of GPB as a broadcaster, are they part of a more sustained and organised editorial effort, and do they impact on the quality of other types of programming? In other words, is Moambe used as a trump card in the broadcaster’s strategy to capture audiences?

The Head of News at the 1st channel, Khatuna Berdzenishvili, says that the current news output enjoys a 6% audience share, while the rest of the programming stays at about 2%. She also says that Moambe has developed its own loyal audience base which could have been larger, had it not been for poor quality programmes right before or after the news. She maintains that they pull down the ratings.

She pins down the success of her unit’s output on the BBC training and consultancy within her department, which introduced forward planning and helped develop news talk shows.

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Her department airs Moambe Plus talk show after the flagship 2000 bulletin twice a week, another one on Sundays, and has just launched a monthly TV debate “Public Policy” with audience participation in the studio – a show fashioned after the flagship BBC “Question Time”.

The Head of News wants to continue the editorial and journalism training and development in her department in order to make the whole news output of the channel an industry standard. But she says this has to be accompanied by training in other departments at GPB: management, programme making, and human resources. Only then can the organisation smash the stereotype that the channel is “unwatchable”. Her view is that the consistent adherence to public broadcasting values will win in the end, but it has to be accompanied by rapid and comprehensive reform.

The Consultant for the present report spent almost all day with the news department at the 1st Channel on Thursday, 8th September, and also watched some of the key news output on Friday, 9th September, including the flagship 2000 Moambe bulletin. What follows below, is the analysis and assessment of the editorial and production effort around some of the news output broadcast on those days.

Daily editorial meeting at 09:30 on Thursday, 8th September

The morning news planning meeting was attended by about 20 journalists, reporters and producers – mostly very young people, and chaired by the Head of Moambe.

- There was no discussion of the day’s news agenda, no discussion which story and why was likely to be the main story of the day, how stories were likely to develop, which angles to cover, what resources to assign to covering particular stories, or how to enrich the coverage of most important stories. There was no discussion of the hierarchy or predicted running order for the next news bulletin which was at 1200.
- More worryingly, there was little evidence of substantial newsgathering effort. Most news stories under consideration seemed to follow other news sources, like newspapers, information agencies or other media outlets. There did not seem to be any news story originated and researched exclusively by the GPB news staff. Very little attention was devoted to verifying stories, checking sources or putting any aspects of a given story under closer scrutiny for accuracy. There was no discussion of the news value, or newsworthiness of particular stories put forward for coverage by reporters and journalists taking part in the meeting.
- There were several stories which seemed to be driven by commercial marketing and PR, like a story about new contact lenses on the Georgian market, which had been confirmed to be safe to use. Nobody seemed to be worried about a possibility of the story being a covert product placement effort.
- The discussion of the international news component was also absent. It received marginal treatment, and no consideration was given to which international events, and why were relevant to the Georgian public. From the way producers related their coverage, it was clear that foreign news tended to be pinched from international news agencies circuits, with minimal or no in-house input.

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- There was no forward discussion about the possible running order or lead stories for the 2000 bulletin, nor was there any planning ahead how to cover the main stories.
- It also turned out that any forward planning for the following day was actually carried out by the Head of News herself, because the forward planning editor was on holiday.
- During the meeting, some of the reporters came up with truly fickle or unsubstantiated story ideas which were not put under question either by the Head of News, or anyone in the meeting. In fact, the lack of interaction or discussion in the meeting was truly puzzling.

To sum up, it looks like the department has a mechanical, second-hand approach to news gathering and news making, with little editorial process, or collective news planning.

News outputting and news outlets

On the basis of information obtained, Moambe produces news and current affairs only for the 1st Channel. It does not share any of its newsgathering effort, its news products or know-how with any other outlet or channel in the organisation. Its 300 staff work on the following news products:

- 5 to 7 minute long TV news bulletins at 0800, 0900 and 1000 as part of the morning programming
- 20 minute long bulletins at 1200 and 1600 – in fact, the actual duration is usually over half an hour
- 2000 flagship news of one-hour duration, preceded by a short news teaser at 1900
- Twice-weekly 15 minutes edition of a talk show, Moambe Plus;
- Once-a-week Sunday talk-show
- A monthly debating talk show, “Public Policy”

Short-term monitoring of news output on the 1st Channel has produced the following observations:

- Apart from starting on the hour, no news bulletin has a fixed duration, and no timed hard posts, or soft posts (that is fixed times for particular blocks or news components in the bulletins).
- The bulletins largely follow a mechanical division into domestic news at the top, and international news towards the end, with most of the time devoted to domestic stories. The international news component is mostly based on APTV or Reuters TV rushes and accompanying raw scripts, and clips picked up from other outlets.
- There is usually no in-house editorial input to explain the context of the international stories to the Georgian viewer, and no attempt to put the output in one hierarchical order. International stories get promoted to the top of the bulletins, when they are lead stories on international networks.

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- The news formats are limited, with no guests or experts in the studio, little interactivity between contributors, little or no news analysis or elements of discussion usually present in longer news programmes. The newsreaders' role is limited to the point of mechanical reading out of cues and scripts, without posing questions to outside broadcast reporters even during live inserts. They do not really act as anchors, presenters or newscasters, which does not add to the authority of the news presentation.

1200 News Bulletin on Thursday, 8th September 2011

Lead story: Russia plane crash (duration about 5 minutes, a collection of loosely edited clips of the scene, witnesses, officials and pundits)

1205 – 1215: A sequence of three sports stories – curtain raisers for evening and future events, so no real news stories – for an aggregate of almost 10 minutes!

Putting three different sports stories back to back almost at the top of the news, with little news content can easily misguide a viewer into believing they are watching a sports programme and not news.

All three reports followed the same pattern of mechanical stand ups repeating the format, in fact, for an inattentive viewer merging into one mega sports story and losing the sense where the basketball story ended and when the rugby story kicked in.

For both the rugby and basketball stories, the reporters doing their stand ups were positioned in front of a stadium and in front of the airport, in an artificial and unimaginative way meant to bring the viewer closer to the event or place of action.

1215-1216: a short story on a hurricane in India – with agency rushes and textual news read out of vision by the newsreader. It is not clear why this particular international story had been chosen to sit here. It was not a dramatic or unusual story about hurricanes in that part of the world. It was most probably randomly chosen from the available agency clips and elevated into the first half of the bulletin, because of the dramatic and cataclysmic content.

1216-1219: A political story on Poland and Georgia with clips and actualities of the meetings of the Georgian president with Polish officials.

1219-1221: A political story out of Brussels.

1221-1224: A story about a newborn baby death with clips of actuality of doctors, experts and officials, shots from hospitals. A story arguably based on a false premise that the baby had died as a result of hospital negligence, or some other wrongdoing, and used to prove that the healthcare situation in Georgia is no cause for concern.

1225-1228: A sequence of three domestic read-only, out-of-vision stories with clips, each of 30 seconds duration, without any additional input or insight. They were typical textual time fillers, usually ignored by viewers because of their low level of visual attractiveness.

1228-1232: A similar sequence of three international news on India, Libya and Mexico – all three dealing with disaster, crime and conflict. They were all translations of scripts accompanying APTV or Reuters rushes, read out by the newsreader with the rushes used for

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20 to 30 seconds. None of the stories had been developed further with an in-house contribution of contextualisation or analysis.

1232-1235: Sports

1235-1238: Culture news and sign off

Comments:

- The 20 minute news bulletin at 1200 was in fact about twice as long, and a clear sign that the producer or editor of the edition simply rammed in all there was available to fill in the time with no regard to the newsworthiness of stories or their visual and journalistic quality.
- The studio screen design marginalised the newsreader by positioning her into the left-hand corner. She took up less than 20% of the screen, with a mixed multicoloured backdrop, making her even less prominent, and relegating her to a newsreading piece of furniture. There was no change of shots during the bulletin, such as close ups of the newsreader, or angle shots. The newscast was totally static in this respect.
- Some news items were purely textual, with the newsreader simply reading the item out in a very fast and rushed fashion – unsuitable for television news. The read was accompanied by floating geometrical figures in the background, similar to a screensaver on a computer, which suggested that there was no news worth concentrating on, because the item was not accompanied by any related visuals.
- The newsreader never interacted with any of the reporters – not even during purportedly live items. She never asked any questions or even moved during the newscast. The lack of connection of the newsreader with the pictures or the protagonists of the stories added to the mechanical nature of the newscast. This lack of interactivity in the studio made a waste of the effort to produce live inserts from the field.
- There was hardly any correlation between the text and the visuals. The reading of uncorrelated agency text to pictures is a mortal sin in professional television news and manifests lack of the editorial process, or no skills how to write to pictures. There was also far too much text in relation to the pictures, and a high degree of duplication in the audio of what the viewers could learn from the picture. So the structure of the textual news was more akin to radio news bulletin with pictures. With the excessively fast reading rate, an average viewer in such cases ignores the text altogether and tries to glean the sense of the story based on the pictures and a few key words.
- The sound levels and sound editing on pictures was all over the place – with level jumps, hard edits (abrupt onsets or endings making the viewer jump), and unacceptable levels of distortion. Such incompetent sound editing and acoustic production makes the viewing a disturbing experience and can strongly demotivate anyone from continuing to watch a bulletin on the subconscious level.
- Probably the biggest waste of resources was the robotic use of the newsreader, who was allowed to read the script mechanically at excessive speed, was positioned in a corner of the screen, merging with the background. No effort was made to bring out

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her ability to interact with reporters, ask questions, make comments and generally claim the role of an anchor and presenter, even though she had a past record of previous reporting skills and journalistic work.

- Except for newsreading, there was no other activity in the studio – not a single interview, no guests, no contextualising or analysis driven from the studio. This made the newscast very weak and unauthoritative.

Flagship 2000 News Bulletin on Friday, 9th September 2011

The Running order: The choice of top stories between 2000 and 2010 appeared random or accidental followed by a presidential “story” at 2011 with 22 minutes of pre-recorded and staged material. This was followed by a science story without an obvious news peg, a packaged health story at 20:37, and a tourism promotional material at 20:42 with absolutely no news value or peg. At 20:43, a historical backgrounder with references to the Czech Spring of 1968, Stalinism and Nazism was aired contextualising some film material related to the August 2008 conflict with Russia over South Ossetia. Next, at 20:48, a news item followed about school textbooks, and another unpegged tourism story at 20:51. A culture story was aired at 20:53. The international news component consisted of a few short items read out of vision by the newsreader and illustrated with agency rushes. The sport section was aired at 21:00, and the culture section at 21:06.

Observations:

- It is very difficult to escape the impression that the whole 2100 bulletin was aimed at creating a “newsy” environment for President Saakashvili’s activities, which sat right in the middle and took more than one third of the whole broadcast.
- The contrast between the carefully edited and staged sequence of shots, interviews and actualities in the presidential material, and the hastily assembled news items was striking. The material about the President’s tour of power supply infrastructure projects across Georgia had nothing to do with a news format, and was more like a short documentary film or a long feature report.
- It is quite interesting to note that the sound technicians had quite expertly filtered out and enhanced the voices during conversations the President had while flying in the noisy helicopter, while nobody bothered to sort out the sloppy sound in the rest of the news items.
- After removal of non-news material, there would be probably about 12-15 minutes left of fully legitimate content from the point of view of newsworthiness.

In conclusion, whatever achievements and improvements Moambe can claim as a result of BBC training and consultancy, they appear to be neutralised by old habits at GPB. The fact that the present Assessment has dwelt at such length on Moambe criticism should not be interpreted as the unit’s underlying weakness, but as its potential strength, and certainly the focus of future attention.

Case-study Two: “What shall we do with the 2nd Channel?”

“The second channel is the best example to what extent GPB is the victim of political

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correctness and international NGO interests imposed on Georgia” (from an interview with a GPB employee)

“It’s a graveyard” said one of the interviewees, while another called the 2nd Channel “a democracy tax”, and a “political rubbish bin”. The idea to establish a parliamentary channel at GPB goes back to 2006, but it was finally fleshed out in the context of political tensions after the August 2008 war. After intense negotiations between the government and the opposition, an agreement was reached to give a television platform to all twenty three registered political parties.

As a result, the channel airs mainly unedited and live parliamentary sessions, political briefings, pressers and party political broadcasts. The rest is empty airtime with a big question mark hanging over the channel. With a budget of about 400,000 lari (or less than 200,000 Euro) per year, there is not much room for manoeuvre. After fixed and operational costs, transmission costs and administrative expenditure, the channel has got virtually nothing left to allow the staff even to think about programme making.

Attempts to populate it with repeats from the 1st Channel and other free available material have done little to make the general audience notice that the 2nd Channel exists. And yet, on the political level, and within GPB management, everybody says it is necessary and useful.

“The creation of the 2nd Channel has defused political tension, so it is a necessary evil” was one voice. Another said: “Perhaps it is a complete waste of money, but at the time of elections, it actually attracts viewers”, while still another claimed that it fulfils a useful role of being an appeasement measure aimed at the opposition. So, nothing to do with a public service mission or audience needs.

The intention had been to fashion the 2nd Channel on BBC Parliament, or the American C-SPAN network. With its half-baked status, and no clear vision the channel is in a limbo and has fallen off the sights and funding priorities of most international organisations. It is no wonder why: if the 1st Channel is often described as “unwatchable”, the 2nd Channel is talked about as “insufferable”, with no editorial input whatsoever.

Perhaps one of the reasons why nothing is being done with the channel is the planned relocation of the Georgian parliament to the city of Kutaisi in 2012, which in turn is expected to trigger the setting up of parliamentary TV and radio studios there. But the physical move of the parliament cannot really be used as an excuse to keep the 2nd Channel well down the priorities list. When and if it relocates as a parliamentary channel to Kutaisi, it will be in exactly the same pitiful condition as it is now.

Consequently, all bids for outside funding for programme making projects hatched by the 2nd Channel have been turned down by international donors so far. This probably reflects quite accurately the picture – even reasonably looking projects like the “Political Masterclass” involving regional governors in debates on current political issues were rejected – most probably because they were associated with the 2nd Channel.

A potential severe legal issue related to the way content is broadcast on the 2nd Channel is that party political broadcasts are not under any editorial scrutiny. It would be quite possible for a political party to broadcast offensive, defamatory or libellous material without the Channel having a possibility to intervene. The argument that libel and defamation are not

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criminal acts according to Georgia's legal system does not absolve the Channel's management, and ultimately GPB management of potential financial liability as a result of litigation for broadcasting offensive material, even if such material has been produced by a third party. According to a memorandum signed by all parties about the nature of broadcasts on the 2nd Channel, there is an option of a "red button" being pushed to switch off offensive material continuing on air, but clearly this is an unworkable solution in practice. It would require an expert editor with extensive legal experience monitoring all such output as it goes out, and reacting with lightning speed to any perceived transgressions.

Another question is whether Georgia in general, and GPB in particular, can afford to fund a parliamentary channel broadcasting unedited endless parliamentary proceedings and other unedited material of dubious quality to essentially nobody. The British, American or German examples are hard to follow, because those countries have a multitude of channels with rich programme offers, and incomparably bigger resources.

Case-study 3: The Future of GPB Radio

Only about 4% of GPB's resources go into radio operations and programming – about half of what many public service broadcasters with both TV and radio operations invest in the medium. In the course of practically all consultations at GPB, its management concentrated on the future of the 1st TV Channel, and its Radio aroused no, or token interest. While there was talk about radio revival and the need to invest in the medium, there was no concrete strategy how to take the two radio channels forward.

Radio 1 on 102.4 FM is a generalist radio station, partly mirroring the generalist nature of TV 1st Channel. Its mixed format of music and speech-based programming is interspersed with hourly news bulletins for most of the day. Apart from news and music, the station produces talk shows, radio drama, children's programmes, and covers sporting events. The Consultant was unable to find out who the target audience is for the station, or reliable data for its current ratings or audience share.

The station has its own news and current affairs unit consisting of 10 staff, who output 5-7 minute illustrated news bulletins on the hour from 0600 till 2200. The unit does not share output or co-operate with the TV news operations. The news bulletins are fashioned on popular commercial formats of reading text against music bed. The reading rate is too fast for an average listener – a practice frequently used by commercial radio stations to cover up for badly written news, usually copied and pasted from agencies and the Internet with little proper editing for radio. This creates informational noise – research shows that an average listener retains little information after hearing hastily read news over background music. If the text has not been professionally turned into a radio format, the level of understanding of such news items is generally very low.

The audio inserts in the GPB radio news bulletins are usually short clips picked up from other sources, and the Consultant was not able to spot any proprietary material like stringer's despatches or packages in the body of the news. There was no evidence that the Radio news department is involved in any active newsgathering.

The station employs an inexcusable practice of playing audio signal from television programmes, such as broadcasting the audio from a programme for women on the 1st Channel. Even more puzzling were the cases of broadcasting the audio from live coverage of

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sporting events on television, such as basketball championship matches, or rugby world cup. Television commentary differs dramatically from the requirements of relating live sporting events on radio, and it is hard to believe that the Georgian commentators would make special allowances for the needs of radio listeners in their reporting. Clearly, the practice illustrates the fact that GPB treats radio as a low priority and will do anything to populate radio schedules cheaply, even though this invariably makes the listeners switch over to other stations or turn off completely.

The station broadcasts daily Voice of America programmes from 2000 until 2100. There was no available research to confirm claims that the audience figures for these broadcasts are very low indeed.

Radio 2 on 100.9 FM plays almost exclusively music, and no news. Strangely enough, when TV live commentary from sporting events is broadcast on Radio1, this is replicated also on Radio 2, giving no other option to listeners of GPB output but to switch over to another station, or turn their radios off.

It is hard to see any public service remit in the content of Radio 2. There are many music radio stations in Georgia, and Radio 2 does not seem to be filling in any perceived gap in the radio output on offer in the country. What distinguishes Radio 2 from other music stations is the choice of music. It plays a lot of well chosen jazz, blues and classical rock, and many taxi drivers and accidental interviewees have told the Consultant they like Radio 2 for its intelligent choice of music. Similar comments were made about the choice of music on Radio 1.

Future Radio strategy. The Head of GPB Radio, Nikoloz Tsertsvadze, has been actively seeking ways of reviving the fortunes of his two stations. The department has just received a grant to install web cameras in radio studios, and deals have been signed to allow the GPB radio signal to be broadcast and made available on several cable networks. It is difficult to see how these developments can significantly change the fortunes of the stations with little talk about increasing or improving their programmatic offer.

The Radio department wants to commission programmes for farmers, with weather and commodity prices as part of the offer, but the idea is again based on speculative assumptions rather than solid audience surveys and research. The same goes for the plan to increase sports coverage on Saturdays. As part of the quest to revive radio, the department also wants to cross-promote its output on the television 1st Channel.

Finally, there is a lot of talk about bringing GPB radio archives under the radio department's roof and to digitise them. The archives go back to 1925, and are a rich repository of material that could be used in contemporary programme making. The issue is again of money, and the radio department would need to find outside financial assistance to secure the project.

The Head of Radio has not looked at drive-time programmes as an avenue to follow in the quest to gain measurable audiences for his stations. He has not considered the option of inserting news summaries carried over from Radio 1 output into Radio 2 music schedules to attract more listeners. There does not seem to be any reliable data available measuring listening habits and trends apart from a recent CRRC general media survey quoted above to plan strategically for designing schedules and programming for morning and afternoon drive-time shows.

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Conclusion: It very much looks like the interest of top GPB management in reviving the radio is limited and there is continuing scepticism at the top of the organisation that it is worth the effort or justifies any extra spending. This is most probably an erroneous approach, because the radio is a cheap and effective medium, requiring very modest investment to achieve pronounced and noticeable results and impact on audience figures. Unlike GPB's television channels, GPB radio channels already stand out on Georgia' radio frequencies, and can easily become market leaders once their schedule and programming are properly calibrated and improved.

3.3. GPB as a business

In assessing the institutional weaknesses of GPB the present Report has pointed out the lack of vision and strategy, the absence of a mechanism for delegating tasks and responsibilities and a consequent micromanagement of the organisation by its top echelon. It very much looks like the absence of successes as a broadcaster is linked to GPB being until now a political rather than a media project. This political conditioning has had a serious impact on the way GPB is run as a business.

3.3.1. Financial constraints

GPB operates on an annual budget of about 23 million Euro (28.2 million GEL for 2012). But it would be misleading to assume that this is what goes into programme making and overheads. The cost of debt servicing and repayment, high operating costs such as excessive charges for transmitters, and in-built accounting inefficiencies eat into the GPB budget to the point that it actually operates on about 60% of the original amount. After deducting salaries of its 930 staff, there is very little left for capital investment, renewal of infrastructure, and even less for programme making. As a consequence, many departments operate on shoestring budgets, and some do not even know how much money they can spend, if any.

In such a context, any talk about investment into developing new content, or taking risks with new programming formats can only irritate or frustrate staff and management. Outside consultants recommending systemic changes to management structure and budgeting models may not be aware that GPB does not really command its own budget. Any substantial spending needs to be agreed with and approved by the Georgian Ministry of Finance well in advance, and in accordance with the Ministry's own accounting requirements. This is because GPB is by law a public institution, and as such it has to abide by those regulations. The Georgian Broadcasting Law, which nominally gives the public broadcaster financial autonomy, does not really apply in practice in this case.

The end result of this apparent legal contradiction is that GPB effectively prepares two different budgets for each forthcoming financial year: one for approval by the Ministry of Finance, and the other – more in line with its role as a broadcaster – for approval by the Board of Trustees. This can hardly help in strategic planning and budgeting for specific programmes, because the budget is broken down into budget headlines cutting across departments and programme making. The lack of modern accounting software makes it almost impossible to assess which programme spends how much on what productions, or cost ahead the programme making requirements of specific units.

The GPB Financial Department DOES use cost coding to trace specific spending in different

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departments, but in actual practice it is almost impossible to establish where the money is going within particular units or projects. There is no established culture of financial planning for programme making projects, and no tradition of applying any business plans or models for new undertakings.

The effective budget for programme making (under the budget headline “Products and Services”) across all of GPB amounts to about 8 million lari (3.5 million Euro) per year. After splitting it into TV and radio channels and then down the line into specific programmes, the amounts become very modest, indeed. Accounting regulations make it very difficult to move any significant amounts from one budget heading to another and require advance approval from the Ministry of Finance. This results in money being apportioned in an administrative fashion and with no regard to business interests of the organisation and without prioritising on the basis of business potential of particular programmes.

The in-built inflexibility of the GPB budget is further constrained by the way the money is disbursed. The annual budget allocation for GPB sits in the state bank, and each time the organisation needs to pay any substantial sums of money, the invoices or contracts have to be approved by the Georgian State Treasury before the money is transferred.

With such financial restraints in place, it is no wonder that GPB finds it very difficult to be popular as a broadcaster, and competitive as a business. GPB management says that its mission as a public service broadcaster is not aimed at being commercially successful, but equally, there is no provision in the existing law that forbids GPB to be an efficient enterprise run along business lines. During interviews, some GPB staff have complained that the insistence on “boring” or “worthy” programmes strictly in line with the mission statement defined in Broadcasting Law is just a cover up for mediocrity and lack of interest on the part of management in transforming the organisation into a vibrant and competitive business.

GPB management says there is no way it can move in the direction of competing with commercial broadcasters such as Imedi or Rustavi2 as far as entertainment programmes are concerned, and it has to compensate with other types of programming, such as educational and informational programmes. It says it cannot afford to buy or produce expensive entertainment formats or programmes, and judging by the size of its budget, it would appear to be the case. But in the same breath, GPB says its entertainment brief is fulfilled by purchasing sports rights for international events and tournaments.

Business Case study One: Sport on GPB

Television rights for high profile international sporting events can be very expensive. Some public broadcasters around much of Europe would not even dream of buying the most expensive ones. Back in the 1990s, there was much debate in the United Kingdom, when the BBC – which is paid for by the licence fee and operates on a budget of several billion Euro a year, gave up the idea of buying the rights for English football Premier League, saying they were too expensive. The rights were bought by a commercial competitor, which unlike the BBC, could recover the cost from advertising revenues.

GPB differs in this respect, because it is allowed by law to generate advertising revenues from broadcasting sporting events. Interestingly, after most recent amendments to Georgia’s broadcasting law, this is the only area left for GPB, where it can air adverts. It would appear that the country’s legislature has left a compassionate window for the public service

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broadcaster to give it a chance to add some more money to its rather modest budget.

But this is rather questionable. GPB's commercial rivals, Imedi and Rustavi2, which used to buy sports rights for many events, have given up the idea of continuing so, after repeatedly losing money on their investments. It turned out that the television advertising market in Georgia is too tight and too small to guarantee handsome returns on sports rights acquisitions. The decision was soon followed by a respective amendment in broadcasting law, curbing even further GPB's right to make money from advertising, and limiting it to sports. During interviews for the present report, government officials have said covering high profile sporting events, such as the Olympics, or games in which the Georgian national teams take part, is part of the public service broadcaster's mission.

But a number of GPB staff have questioned this philosophy, saying that spending several million lari a year on sports, which they say is not exactly entertainment by classical definition of the genre in television and radio, and almost nil on true entertainment programmes, is damaging the organisation. As it turns out, in most cases GPB has been unable to break even on its sports coverage, and sustained losses of up to 40% on its original investment in a given sporting event.

Some interviewees have pointed out that the latest version of the Georgian broadcasting law effectively allows GPB to buy sports rights, but does not oblige it to do so in order to generate advertising revenues. They say any decision to buy specific rights should be based on a business calculation that GPB will be able to recover the investment, and not on the outside political decision forcing GPB management to buy rights for specific events. They have quoted the issue of the recent purchase of the Basketball Championships in Lithuania by GPB, which they say was preceded by intense pressure from the Georgian Basketball Federation, and not by any popular demand.

Several others have referred back to the past practice of the main television channels in Georgia sharing the coverage of sports, including those deemed of national interest, and think such a deal among the three main TV channels should be revived. They say that it is still possible because Imedi and Rustavi2 have created a similar commercial partnership with relationship to advertising, even though they are bitter competitors. And they say that the questionable "duty" to cover sports has fallen upon GPB, precisely because Rustavi2 and Imedi ganged up together in a joint quest to cut continuing losses.

But the management at GPB points out that sport is necessary to lift the viewing figures for their channels, even though no relevant surveys have been presented to substantiate the claim that one-off events like sports do impact on the channels' ratings in a sustained way. It is no secret that the public generally does not display any loyalty as to which television channel broadcasts their favourite sport, unless it is for reasons of specialist coverage and commentary, or accompanying products. No such specialisation or expertise is in much evidence at GPB.

Business Case study Two: the Marketing Department and Advertising

GPB's Marketing Department employs 8 people and is in charge of marketing and branding strategy, audience research and sales. It would appear that it covers quite a wide brief, including what some other organisations put separately under Business Development, Procurement or Sales.

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In theory, the Marketing Department is responsible for generating advertising revenues for GPB, but in fact this job has been assigned to an outside monopolist agency, General Media, which also sells advertising slots for Imedi and Rustavi2. The common view on the media market is that General Media was founded after both commercial television rivals realised that continuing competition for business in the limited advertising market in Georgia would only increase their losses.

General Media sells advertising for both Rustavi2 and Imedi on the basis of commissions set in the contracts with the two channels. It is the only agency in Georgia that advertisers can approach to gain access to high ratings television airtime – also after paying for the service. GPB has also become its client, although it can only sell slots for its sporting events, which is a very small sum compared to the volume of business from Imedi and Rustavi2.

As pointed out elsewhere in the present Report, GPB has been unable to cover the cost of sports rights through advertising sales. Does it make sense then for GPB to sign a contract with an outside agency and lose even more money by paying commissions? Some interviewees have pointed out that it may have little to do with the question whether the in-house marketing department is incompetent or too lazy to sell successfully, but with the fact that on the political level advertisers may have been told to go only through General Media.

The GPB marketing department has recently conducted its own internal SWOT analysis, and has admitted that its audience research is not giving the public service broadcaster a good sense of what the public wants from them.

Contrary to statements from the management that GPB's role is not to supply entertainment – especially in the context of its oversupply by the commercial rivals – the research conducted by the Marketing Department strongly suggests that entertainment is what the audience wants from GPB. On the basis of surveys conducted by the audience research unit within the Marketing Department, its Head, David Arveladze, says the decision to buy more sporting events by GPB is fully justified.

Brand promotion is high on the agenda of the Marketing Department. It is currently considering using street marketing to promote GPB as a broadcaster. It is an interesting strategy, usually employed in cases when access to mainstream media is either too expensive, or limited for political reasons. This does not seem to be the case with GPB.

The Marketing Department has also been using billboards to increase viewing figures – particularly to publicise its coverage of sporting events, such as the recent Basketball Championships in Lithuania.

Business Case study Three: the Documentary Film Department

The Documentary Films Unit stands out among the rest in that it clearly seems to know what it does, what it wants to do in the future and what it needs to achieve its objectives. Its appetite and vision is proportionate to the place it takes within GPB, and its budget share, while its Head is clearly aware of his department's limitations and current possibilities.

The unit employs 24 film directors, script writers, camera operators, video editors and production assistants. There are weekly planning meetings, during which story ideas for films are discussed, decided on and fleshed out. Some stories ideas are referred to Director General for approval. There is no formal procedure for editorial or legal referral, and no

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formal commissioning system for film production.

The Documentary Film Department produces at least one film per week, and sometimes two. The average duration is 30 minutes, although longer films – up to an hour – are not a rarity. New productions are first broadcast on Friday nights at 2000, and repeated on Sundays at 1500. The average budget per film is about 3,500 Euro.

The Head of the unit wants his staff to become more professional in shooting high quality documentary films that could be sold abroad. He dreams of his script writing team receiving high calibre training in script writing to boost the attractiveness of his productions. His other dream is to follow the example and practices of the BBC Bristol factual film powerhouse.

The department needs two more expert video editors and post-production specialists. And the strategic objective is to set up partnerships with prestigious and experienced film makers and broadcasters with the view to co-production of films that could be shown both at home and abroad, and which could pay for themselves and perhaps for making more films.

The Documentary Films Unit is an island on the GPB landscape with its well defined role and mission, well articulated needs and aspirations, and a professional approach and working practices. It is not a money making enterprise and has no commercial brief, but it operates in a business-like manner with a highly professional approach.

3.4. People at GPB

“We are limited to performing post office duties here” (GPB staff member)

Limited mandate. Much has been said and written about GPB Human Resources and employment policies in recent years. The head of the Human Resources department, Gia Bakradze, says that his own mandate is quite limited, and often consists in processing the files and documents of the new arrivals, whose employment, as he describes it, is decided in an “outside process”.

He says that previous attempts to introduce real HR policies and practices failed because nobody within the management wanted to give up their spheres of influence. As a result, all the usual ingredients of professionally run HR operations, like recruitment policies, staff appraisal systems, job descriptions, employment priorities, reward and pay scales or bands and so on, do not really exist in the modern sense, or do not work.

Another complaint is that GPB is only able to offer two types of contracts to staff:

- a permanent, or continuing contract (awarded mostly to senior staff and management)
- short term contracts of one year, three months or one month.

There are no ad hoc options like freelance contracts to increase flexibility and operational efficiency for short-term or special projects in the organisation. So, for any casual work, GPB still has to draw up one-month contracts which must be approved and signed well in advance, further limiting the working practices in production departments.

Staff instability without staff flexibility. Despite the obligation to draw up contracts for all staff, GPB suffers from high staff turn-over and workforce instability. The Head of HR

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department puts it down to the lack of proper job descriptions and informal recruitment culture. GPB management has repeatedly complained that the quality, skills and competence of its new staff – particularly in journalism and editorial jobs, are very low because universities in Georgia produce low quality graduates. Another argument is that GPB is unable to offer higher salaries to attract higher grade specialists. But the HR department appears to be blaming this situation on slack recruitment and employment culture.

The Human Resources Department says that the skills and competencies deficiency among staff could be addressed successfully, if GPB had an in-house training and staff development capacity, which it says does not exist. There is no policy on setting up career paths for new employees, no procedures to define developmental needs of particular employees, and no institutionalised on-the-job training, or even new staff induction procedures. The head of HR says:

“I need training and development capacity in-house badly to address the skills gaps of the new staff who arrive at GPB and clearly do not fit into the jobs they have been given”.

It would appear then that the organisation employs people who are not initially suitable to do their jobs properly. If this is the status quo and the culture that cannot be easily changed, then it looks like the only option GPB has to improve its fortunes is to train and retrain many of its staff members to produce a critical mass that would have a discernible impact on content quality of its programmes. No such mechanism exists. In contrast, the 3rd Russian-language channel, PIK – which as has been mentioned before is in effect a separate entity from the rest of GPB – has got its own training house, and provides in-house training to staff on a continuing basis.

The idea, or indeed the necessity, to train, retrain and develop staff in media outlets on an institutional level is nothing new. A number of large media organisations, such as Deutsche Welle, Reuters, or the BBC, have in-house training units, some of which have been elevated to the status of colleges or academies. Interestingly enough, in countries like Great Britain or Germany, graduates of journalism departments are not usually accused of having being incompetently trained by their universities, but still large media organisations there provide in-house training as part of career-long staff development.

Some interviewees for the present report have put forward the view that the best approach for GPB would be to fire incompetent staff – perhaps in their hundreds – and give the public service broadcaster a fresh start. But several have admitted that the past clean-outs of top management at GPB have not changed much in the organisation. There is little reason for believing that firing operational staff by numbers will result in the arrival of better qualified employees without a properly functioning HR department, which itself admits inability to change the culture of informal employment practices based on private interests or spheres of influence.

Another interesting element of the “people” policies at GPB is that although it is a public service broadcaster, there is no body to protect or safeguard employment rights or social interests of the employees. There are no trade unions, and there is no evidence of professional associations being active within the organisation. Because of the short-term nature of contracts for most staff, it is difficult for GPB management to expect a high level of loyalty or motivation from rank-and-file employees who can be dismissed with one-month notice and without redress.

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GPB has no policy or mechanism for internal staff mobility and advancement through such popular schemes as attachments, secondments, or interdepartmental exchange of staff which are in themselves training and development tools. An even more worrying thing for GPB as a broadcaster is that it has no institutionalised talent spotting mechanism or unit, and no talent development. Television is largely based on personalities supported by well planned and organised production effort of professional teams of people working together. GPB arguably has no resources to employ stars and celebrities demanding rocket-high salaries, but it certainly can develop its own celebrity stable, if it has an in-house training and development capacity.

Just to give one example of mechanical approach to staff, on Thursday, 8th September, the 1200 news bulletin was presented by a female newsreader. She was positioned in the left-hand side part of the studio screen, taking up about 20% of the screen, and merging with the multicoloured, non-descript background. She read out the news texts robotically at great speed. She never interacted with any of the reporters or contributors, and never asked any questions. As it turns out, the lady was shot and wounded during a live broadcast from the field at the time of the August 2008 war. She never stopped broadcasting and became an instant celebrity. It would be a shame not to exploit this by developing her potential further to become a brand with her own proprietary programmes and regular slots – a frequent practice in major commercial news networks. It is very likely that there are many more such cases of unrealised potential throughout GPB.

Leadership deficit. It is quite evident that GPB has enough management but not enough leadership – a term usually associated with vision and ability to inspire other people to turn this vision into reality. Capable leaders are rarely God-given individuals in any organisation, but have to be either recruited or developed inside the organisation. GPB has no in-built capacity or mechanism for leadership development, and as a result it suffers from the lack of efficient middle management. The top management cannot concentrate on formulating a vision for GPB and on strategic planning because it does not trust the middle management enough to delegate operational issues.

Conclusion. GPB Human Resources is fully aware of all these issues, and would like to have a consultant to help write job descriptions for specific roles in the organisation. Its position is that professional HR policies and procedures are crucial for the success of GPB as a broadcaster. It is impossible to argue with this position, but it is deemed necessary to point out that jobs descriptions cannot be formulated without input from heads of units, middle managers and editors. Likewise, any professional policies and procedures will not work in the context of recruitment controlled from outside. The Consultant for the present Assessment strongly believes that GPB Human Resources department needs to concentrate on internal processes and procedures as a realistic objective. The tools to achieve that would rely on the existing staff and try to exploit fully its dormant potential through in-house training and development at all levels. Meetings, interaction and interviews with staff reflected high personal qualities of many of them, accompanied by continuing loyalty and commitment despite low salaries, job insecurity and internal problems within the organisation.

3.5. Other Issues

GPB staff and management have expressed a number of requests for assistance in many areas. The present Report has focused on issues that can and should be shaped into a

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sustainable programme of achievable objectives with the final beneficiary – the Georgian public, and the Georgian democracy in mind. It is the position of the present Assessment that one-off or short term assistance and intervention to help maintain the operational capability or short-term expediencies in the organisation would not be appropriate and should be sought from other sources or through other means such as internal efficiencies. Some other issues, like the forthcoming digitisation, or GPB's relocation to new premises, are likely to be addressed by other projects and processes. They are briefly treated in sections below.

3.5.1. Infrastructure and equipment

GPB has listed a number of equipment and infrastructural needs, such as the requirement to replace overloaded servers, install better storage hardware, or the need to have a proper Intranet. The request to acquire new integrated software for news and current affairs editing and production is the equipment component which most closely falls within the remit of supporting and improving journalism, production standards, news output and the overall content in GPB schedules. The prospect of relocation to new premises in the near future is a further deterrent to investing heavily into the old premises, the more so, because there have been several rounds of studio equipment renewal recently, triggering criticism of unnecessary expenditure from other departments.

3.5.2. Radio archive

A number of GPB staff, including the Head of Radio, have said that the Radio Archive – going back to 1925 – is a valuable asset which is in danger of being lost, or partly lost. They say there is urgent need to digitise it and make it available and retrievable on demand for programme making purposes. Utilisation of archive audio clips and other historical material would make it much easier to produce radio programmes and help populate radio schedules with quality materials. But there are other pressing equipment and infrastructural requirements at GPB, such as integrated multimedia news production software for Moambe, which it is felt should take precedence.

3.5.3. Programme procurement and outsourcing

Some members of GPB senior management have expressed the wish to use the planned Technical Assistance resources to purchase outside programmes in an effort to improve overall content across their schedules. It is difficult to see how such use of resources would boost the internal capacity of the organisation and contribute to securing its future as a public service broadcaster on the media market. The present Assessment maintains that further investment into technology and infrastructure or outside programming will not save GPB from further marginalisation without deep internal reform.

3.5.4. Digitisation

The Georgian government has admitted that it is lagging behind with the process leading up to the digital switch-over, which should take place by 2015. A number of organisations and international assistance projects, such as Soros Open Society Institute, or the IREX G-Media, have already stated their readiness to extend assistance in the transition to the digital broadcasting. It would be difficult to incorporate digitisation elements into the planned Technical Assistance at this preliminary stage without concrete parameters available.

3.5.5. Relocation

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GPB is due to relocate to new premises outside the city centre in the next couple of years, and quite probably the process will be timed to coincide with the digital switch-over. On the basis of the information obtained, Tbilisi city authorities will provide land and build a customised media centre for GPB in return for the old premises. The plan is not specific enough at this stage to factor relocation in the planned Technical Assistance.

4. Recommendations

The present Assessment argues that GPB is in a unique position to break the stalemate in the TV landscape, which has seized up in a freeze-frame fashion as a result of narrow vested interests, and the persistent refusal of the government to realise the importance and the value of a public service broadcaster which deserves to be treated seriously. The management at GPB has requested assistance in a large number of areas, and its wish list is long. Given the financial scope and the timeframe of the planned Technical Assistance programme for GPB, it is thought that one of the foremost tasks of the present needs assessment is to prioritise properly the stated and perceived needs, and to draw a realistic and achievable roadmap for the Georgian Public Broadcaster.

There is no clear evidence or record of a significant public debate on the role and the mission of public service broadcasting in Georgia. Most of the discussions to date have taken place in a narrow context of politics and in professional circles without much participation from the wider public or the audiences. This tendency is reflected throughout the thinking at GPB, and has contributed to the sense of loss and disorientation within the organisation as a direct result of being divorced from the general audience, and operating in a vacuum as to what the public might possibly want and need. The vague and general statements of its mission in the Georgian legislation on public broadcasting can scarcely be seen as sufficient to guide GPB on its quest for identity and justification for existence.

The absence of a well articulated mission statement in the organisation which would guide it towards a programme-making and market-driven strategy is central to achieving other goals. The Georgian public broadcaster is firmly stuck in its current position as a marginal player on the broadcast media market and has accepted outside views about its role and limitations as its own. Reliance on outside donor interventions to change its fortunes has done nothing to build up its self-confidence and convince it that it can become a successful and popular broadcaster in Georgia.

In order to break through, GPB needs to formulate a clear mission statement, which would be based on audience surveys and research, in order to institute a genuine editorial process and forward thinking. Its strategy needs to be based on concrete objectives measurable through benchmarking, and recognised indicators and shaped into a timed framework, with milestones and deadlines. GPB operates in a market environment, and should not be averse to well calculated and assessed risk.

There is a strong case for overcoming prejudice and animosity towards its 3rd Channel, PIK, which has achieved quite a lot precisely due to having a mission statement, concrete objectives and tight deadlines. GPB can draw lesson from PIK experience, and where useful and justified, replicate its best practice and exploit its successes. The case of PIK is a good example that an efficient and time-limited transformation of the rest of GPB is both possible

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and doable.

On the basis of the analysis of the current position of GPB as a public service broadcaster, it is clear that its biggest potential asset is the News and Current Affairs component. Investment of extra resources into the development, improvement and professionalisation of that department, and propagation of its projected achievements across all GPB channels is the most likely and feasible avenue to follow in an attempt to reconnect GPB with wider audiences and win their trust. The present Assessment recommends focusing any sustained Technical Assistance programme on the following broadcasting areas:

1. "Moambe" – News and Current Affairs Department at the 1st Channel;
2. Radio 1 (102.4FM) and Radio 2 (100.9FM)
3. 2nd Channel on television (the so-called Parliamentary channel)
4. Documentary Films Unit

In a future assistance programme, Moambe should be seen as a hub or a focal point for radical change in the quality of output and editorial integrity. The changes achieved at Moambe will strengthen the 1st Channel, enable to revive the future of the two radio channels and the ailing 2nd television channel, while improvements in the documentary films department will help GPB populate its television schedules with better output and showcase the public broadcaster as a brand.

At the institutional and management level, it is recommended that GPB undertakes a radical overhaul of its structure with emphasis on developing the impact of News and Current Affairs across all its outlets, creating internal synergies among channels, and investing into staff training and development. In order to be able to do that successfully, and to achieve efficiencies without staff layoffs, it is necessary to eliminate wasteful duplication of effort, and change the culture of evasive attention to investment in infrastructure and technology or sporting events to the detriment of the crucial missing ingredients: editorial policies and processes, and quality journalism. To achieve this, it is proposed that:

1. **New Moambe.** Moambe becomes an autonomous unit within the GPB structure, preferably headed by a Deputy Director General. The "New Moambe" unit will:
 - Be split away from the 1st Channel
 - Be responsible for newsgathering, and news output generation for all channels, including PIK and radio.
 - Keep all news operations at GPB under one editorial roof, but with dedicated teams for each channel.
 - Coordinate editorial planning and policies as well as all news products, which will be shared and reversioned according to format needs and specificity of a given outlet.
2. **News streaming.** Drawing on the processes developed by PIK, the New Moambe will fashion its general news operations along the lines of news streaming. It will:

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- Work towards being seen in the future by the public as the main news provider in Georgia. The Georgian public needs to know that whenever they tune in to any GPB outlet, there will be quality news and information within their reach and at hand, but not in excessive quantity.
3. **News and Politics Channel.** The 2nd or “Parliamentary” channel will become a news and politics channel, and will include specialist parliamentary coverage and reporting also supplied by Moambe. It will:
 - Broadcast short hourly news bulletins on the hour throughout the day, but also the main news bulletins of the 1st Channel, including the flagship 2000. This will create a quality skeleton content for the channel and will shut up the critics complaining that it is a broadcasting graveyard. The issue of filling in the rest of the 2nd channel schedule is a matter of developing more quality products, such as specialist political and parliamentary reporting and election reporting.
 - Rebroadcast a number of 1st Channel products at different times, such as the talk shows and documentaries.
 - Continue to broadcast party political broadcasts and briefings, but do so outside peak times and high viewing slots.
 - Include programmes in ethnic minorities languages.
 4. **Streamlined News on the 1st Channel.** More targeted and better produced news will be supplied by Moambe to the 1st Channel.
 - The daily schedule will have several main bulletins, with attention focusing on the flagship 2000.
 - The channel will continue as a generalist channel, and will carry on with current political talk shows which should be improved editorially.
 - All news bulletins should be much shorter and have fixed duration, with predictable times for specific blocks of news.
 5. **Moambe News on Radio.** The New Moambe will supply radio news bulletins on the hour using general news content generated by the unit.
 - Radio 1 news bulletins will continue with the 5 minutes duration, but the station should work towards a drive time programme with talk shows and phone-ins on politics and social issues.
 - Radio 2, which currently only plays music, should broadcast news summaries of 1 or 2 minutes duration on the hour supplied by Moambe.
 6. **On-line news provision.** The New Moambe should have an on-line news team, and should develop online content drawing on the achievements of PIK in this area.
 7. **Parliamentary and election unit.** There should be a new dedicated parliamentary and election unit within Moambe, specialising in those areas.

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- Political and parliamentary reporters to cover events in the run up to elections, providing analysis and context.
 - Given the forthcoming electoral seasons across 2012, 2013 and 2014, investing in elections and parliamentary coverage is the best strategy for GPB to distinguish itself from commercial rivals and attract more viewers and listeners.
8. **Expert coverage of sport.** If GPB decides to continue investing in the coverage of international sporting events, this should be accompanied by the development of expert coverage of those broadcasts.
- Specialist commentators, guests in the studio, phone-ins and debates, plus associated programming. Such a strategy will be more effective in attracting more viewers and ultimately more advertising revenues than billboards and street marketing.
9. **Documentary series and co-productions.** The Documentary Films Unit should try to find partners for co-productions, particularly among prestigious Western production houses.
- Following script-writing and post-production training, any educational study tours for directors and executive producers should be combined with scoping missions to seek strategic partnerships.
 - Given the trend in the West for series rather than single films, the GPB documentary films unit should think in terms of series and thematic seasons when commissioning new productions.
 - It should also seek synergies with a parallel documentary unit at PIK (the 3rd Channel).
 - Finally, the unit should produce short promos of its films to be inserted into advertising slots during news bulletins.
10. **More talk shows and debates.** The New Moambe should continue working on the improvement of the existing talk shows and debates, and on the development of new products in this area.
11. **Personalities in news programmes.** As part of developing in-house training capacity, Moambe will:
- Develop policies aimed at creating personalities and brand names in its news programmes, steering away from celebrity approach, but concentrating on achieving the popularity of its presenters based on their competence, experience and authority.
 - Talent spotting, personal development and presentation skills will be part of the training programme on offer.

5. Tools to institute the recommended changes and to achieve desired objectives

All recommended changes and objectives can be achieved in the framework of a well

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coordinated, comprehensive programme of Technical Assistance over a period of two years, which would cover crucial election seasons in Georgia. The programme would need to focus on implementing radical institutional and structural changes based on a specified and well justified strategy, but more crucially would have to centre on creating editorial policies and processes, and dramatically lifting the quality of journalism.

The suggested programme would have to aim at achieving sustainability of change, through skills transfer and multiplier effects. Its training and capacity raising programme needs to include an establishment of a strong in-house training and development component within Moambe. The role of the in-house training centre will be to supply on-the-job training and career development opportunities, as well as to impact on the quality of journalism, and ultimately the quality of programmes produced by Moambe.

that news journalists are generally able to transfer to other editorial departments easily, while the reverse process is usually very difficult. Moambe in-house training will be a breeding ground for better journalists and better quality journalism across all GPB departments.

5.1. General Training

The first cycle of practice-based training for GPB news and current affairs staff will have two aims in mind: to supply trainees with specific skills and abilities, and to identify potential future trainers among them. It is recommended that training be provided in the following areas:

- Journalism skills training
 - What's news? News values and criteria.
 - Newsgathering techniques; active and passive newsgathering, sources
 - Truth, accuracy, balance, impartiality
 - Writing for radio, writing to pictures, writing for the web
 - Interviewing skills
 - Presentation skills
 - Reporting from the field and outside broadcasts
 - Media ethics and legal issues, crime reporting
 - Conflict, war and unrest
 - Taste, decency, reporting on children and vulnerable groups
 - Ethnic minorities and gender issues in journalism
- Editorial skills training
 - News hierarchies, lead stories, editorial meetings
 - Forward planning, editorial team work,

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- Editorial independence and integrity, editorial control
- Giving feedback, output evaluation,
- Newsroom management training
 - Output planning and logistics
 - Production team management
 - Outputting news and content management
- Technical skills and production training
 - Camera operators, video editors, sound editing
 - Studio direction and gallery production
 - Outside broadcasts and technical software training

All training should be preceded by on-line courses which will serve as competence thresholds and their completion will be a motivating condition to qualify for face-to-face training in simulated or real work environment.

5.2. Training of Trainers

Trainees identified during the first cycle as potential future trainers will be invited to take part in Training of Trainers courses (ToT), the aim of which is to create in-house pool of co-trainers for outside consultants delivering courses. Co-trainers will deliver courses side by side with the outside consultants during the second cycle of general training. Following that, they will be able to deliver further training on their own.

5.3. Specialist training

The programme should continue with more specialised training in order to produce political reporters, financial journalists, parliamentary correspondents, health and social affairs reporters, newsroom managers, output editors or newsgathering editors. Such trainings should be practice based and project based. In other words, they all should produce concrete outputs and products, such as TV packages or radio features at the end of respective courses. The outputs should be of broadcastable quality and find their way into the GPB schedules.

5.4. On-site consultancies

The programme should include one-to-one and small group consultancy to senior management and targeted production units. Consultants will advise on such issues as strategic planning, step-change management, leadership training and development, commissioning content, or the art of delegating responsibility. Some of the consultancy will be planned ahead and some will be supplied on a more ad-hoc basis depending on the needs of the Beneficiary.

5.5. Co-productions

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The programme should also aim at boosting the content of GPB programming. The impact of training and capacity building among the beneficiary staff on the quality of programming and content usually takes considerable time, so the planned Technical Assistance should also provide instruments for short-term generation of broadcasting outputs which can act as examples to follow. This can be achieved by inviting individuals or teams working in specific areas of programming to produce outputs together with GPB staff. The Documentary Films Unit is a particularly suitable candidate for such projects.

5.6. Pilot programming

The planned Technical Assistance may invite specialists to assist in developing new formats and types of programming at GPB in order to avoid the need to purchase new format licences and to reduce the risk associated with novel projects. This is particularly useful in the case of new talk shows and debate programmes, where previous experience can prevent the Beneficiary from making costly mistakes, or producing uninteresting products. Such specialists may help produce pilot programmes to test the new products before they are launched on the market.

5.7. Seminars and conferences

Specific issues relevant to the Beneficiary organisation, or the media sector as a whole, can be discussed and be subject of seminars and conferences supported by the Technical Assistance programme. Such activities will also have the desired visibility and wider dissemination effect.

5.8. Audience research and monitoring

The Beneficiary has been suffering from a shortage of reliable and comprehensive audience research and measurement which would inform its programming and strategic decisions. Technical Assistance support in conducting bespoke audience research aimed at improving GPB programming offer would be of great benefit to the organisation.

5.9. Study tours and exchanges

Visits to major media organisations – particularly those having robust news operations, would be of great use to the Beneficiary's newsroom editors and managers. They would be able to see how news editorial and planning process is conducted by highly professional and efficient organisations, employing thousands of people and handling highly complex processes.

6. Preconditions

The Beneficiary needs to commit fully to comprehensive changes within its structures and practices before embarking on the requested programme. Otherwise, the impact of the planned Technical Assistance will be limited and may be ignored by the audiences. The Beneficiary should realise that it is a make or break situation, and that the forthcoming long election season combined with a long-term funding opportunity is a unique chance to change its fortunes both in the eyes of the public and in the eyes of the government. In order to be able to exploit fully this opportunity, it should:

- Integrate properly its news and current affairs operations across all channels and set

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up a proper multimedia news provision, including an on-line news operation;

- Formulate its programming and marketing strategy based on genuine research and audience needs and not on inside politics and vested interests
- Conduct a comprehensive radio survey, or commission a professional agency to do it, in order to formulate a realistic and honest programme of revival and investment in radio, which is a neglected medium, but can be resuscitated easily with an injection of relatively modest resources;
- Commit fully to the idea of staff development and training, and to the crucial importance of instituting real editorial policies and processes.
- Initiate a public awareness campaign about the role and mission of public service broadcasting

7. Expected results

As a result of the proposed set of activities and interventions, it is expected that by the end of the planned Technical Assistance, the Georgian Public Broadcaster will achieve the following:

- Increase its news and informational offer of quality programmes across all its outlets on the basis of an integrated news and current affairs multimedia operation justifying the current employment level of almost 600 people in news and current affairs departments;
- Improve the level of journalism and the editorial quality of its news provision, increase the authority of its voice to the point that GPB will no longer stand accused of being a government mouthpiece, or propaganda in disguise;
- Develop expertise and specialisation in covering parliamentary issues, and in covering elections to the level of becoming a leader in this area on the Georgian media market;
- Inject a new life in its radio stations by supplying quality news on both of them, and by launching drive-time programmes
- Reshape the 2nd Channel into a fully functioning outlet with a fully populated schedule containing hourly news and political programmes;
- Create targeted flagship news programmes of fixed duration on the 1st Channel, and more engaging talk shows and debates;
- Strengthen the offer of the Documentary Films Unit;
- Develop self-sustained in-house training and development capacity for editorial and production staff
- Develop a connection with the audience underpinned by calibrated audience research and surveys informing decisions on commissioning and production of future content.

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It is also expected that the Final Beneficiary of the planned Technical Assistance – the Georgian public – will benefit from it in the following ways:

- Reliable, factual and accurate news and information provision will significantly increase on both radio and television, reaching the majority of the Georgian population thanks to wide coverage of the GPB radio and TV signals;
- A wider news and current affairs brief in the GPB content, including social issues, controversial stories, and balanced views will contribute to a more active and participatory consumption of information leading to a renewal of public debate base on reasoning and dialogue, and not on political animosity and hostility;
- A more autonomous and authoritative voice of the public broadcaster will work towards the government treating it seriously, and investing it with a real public service mission aimed at fulfilling a democracy brief, rather than a subservient role.

The present Assessment recommends an aggressive and sustained intervention on behalf and for the benefit of GPB, requiring genuine effort and commitment on the part of its management. There are many elements in its institutional structure and its tradition that could not be found elsewhere on the media market, and which are indispensable to fulfil a valuable service to the Georgian public. The planned assistance is a unique chance for GPB to change the perception that it is a liability and not an asset, and that it can be dispensed with, or that it does not matter.

8. List of Annexes

1. Schedule of Meetings conducted between 5th and 20th September 2011