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The role of the Channel PIK in highlighting Russian-Georgian relations

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Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

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The 20th century was characterized by three developments of great political importance: the growth of democracy, the growth of corporate power, and the growth of corporate propaganda as a mean of protecting corporate power against democracy.

In contemporary world mass media is no longer perceived solely as a channel of communication. Increasingly, the mass media is referred to as full-fledged agent of socialization that influences on the development of the individual and society as a whole, demonstrates means of mass media standards, forms a system of values that are taught to mediate experience, etc.

From an instrument of propaganda or an instrument of power the media have become a powerful source of power itself, which has transformed into the key of fame and success.

Today the means of mass media serve as a mechanism for promoting products and services, and arenas for debate. Mass communication is a systematic distribution of the information through the specialized technical equipment among the large audience aiming the influence on the evaluation, opinion and human behavior.

Actuality of the topic becomes valuable, because of the overgrowing nature of mass communication on a global scale, as a source of power and innovation disseminator.

In modern conditions, people become dependent on the mass media. First of all, it concerns the information, knowledge and assessments of what is happening in the society. The type and level of this dependence are determined by a number of structural conditions. The influence of mass communication is greater if the society is under the huge reforms, conflict or instability. Also, much more depends on the extent to which the mass communication implements its informational function.

On this basis, the main objective of this work is to examine the role and influence of the Georgian Channel PIK broadcasting in Russian language. Therefore the study attempts to reveal the following tasks:

- 1) To find how the Channel PIK was created.
- 2) To highlight the circumstances in the August 2008 and the role of the channel in the coverage of the Russian-Georgian conflict.
- 3) To find out the impact of the Channel PIK on the formation of public opinion about republic of Georgia in the space of post-soviet Union countries.
- 4) To define Channel PIK as an instrument of public communication/soft power of Georgia.
- 5) To draw conclusions on the subject.

During the writing has been used periodical literature on the subject as well as Internet resources and programs of the Channel PIK.

According to the Freedom Map of Freedom House's report¹ for 2008, Georgia was a partly free country and remains so till nowadays². At the same time it is ranked higher than its neighbors, Armenia and Azerbaijan and Russia, which are classified as „not free”. Other „partly free countries” include Turkey, Ukraine, Romania, Albania and majority of Eastern Europe.

In Georgia, a country that has declared dedication to the principles of democracy and the freedom of speech, the need of independent and professional media as well as exploration of freedom of expression became one of the most important questions for the contemporary Georgian media.

But before we discover the status quo of media in Georgia and namely the role of the Kanal PIK³, has to be mentioned the historical background of the Russian Georgian relations in the field of communication from the very beginning.

On 8 III 1819 in Tbilisi was established the first newspaper in Georgian language, translated from Russian and named „Georgia's Newspaper”⁴. The aim of such a step was the translation of the news and the articles published on the papers in the Russian Empire. It was the first period of the information war⁵, when Russian propaganda was trying to influence on the population of Georgia. The importance of the language was obvious, but unlike XXI century in XIX in Georgia weren't so many people understanding Russian fluently. Since 1820 the paper was published as „Georgian newspaper”⁶ and was shooting the light on the social and political life for Georgian speaking readers, what was an attempt to save not only the native language, but own identity, traditions and culture. But almost two centuries later new reality demanded to establish the channel, broadcasting in Russian in order to share own views to the Russian speaking society and to let

¹ *Map of Press Freedom 2008*, <http://www.freedomhouse.org> (31 X 2013).

² <http://www.freedomhouse.org/country/georgia> (31 X 2013).

³ Kanal PIK – is used the transcription of the Channel PIK in Russian „Канал ПИК”.

⁴ http://www.tsu.edu.ge/data/file_db/library/GeoNews%201.pdf (31 X 2013).

⁵ О. Панфилов, *Россия-Грузия. Информационная война. Август 2008*, Тбилиси 2011, s. 11.

⁶ <http://www.nplg.gov.ge/paper/papers/paper.php?did=1999> (31 X 2013).

other peoples know about the situation the South Caucasus and Georgia itself from Georgian perspective.

According to Civil.Ge, the First Caucasian was launched on January 2010⁷ and was available on satellite, operated by Paris-based Eutelsat Communications for less than two weeks of January.⁸ Eutelsat Communication⁹, the Europe's leading satellite operator, citing end of trial period put the channel off its W7 satellite and entered into a larger deal with Russia's Gazprom Media Group on allocating capacity on W7 satellite for its pay-TV provider NTV-Plus. Although the Eutelsat announced, that the problem was technical and not political, in January 2010, French diplomat in Tbilisi said that „Eutelsat is under strong pressure from Russia in order to stop its contract with Georgia”¹⁰.

Georgia claimed Russia's political pressure behind Eutelsat's move and the Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB) sued the satellite operator, but the Paris-based court ruled in favor of Eutelsat in July, 2010¹¹.

The TV station, Kanal PIK, started broadcasting with a live call-in show with Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili. It is not the first Georgian sortie in the long-running information war between Georgia and Russia¹², Alania TV¹³ began broadcasting news as well in Russian language to separatist-controlled South Ossetia in 2005¹⁴. The station disappeared from prominence after the 2008 war with Russia over South Ossetia, but, a year later, another Russian-language satellite TV station emerged.

On 12 VII 2010, deputy general director of GPB, Maya Bichikashvili¹⁵, told Civil.Ge that in its ruling, the Paris-based court rejected GPB's motion demanding from Eutelsat to restore the Russian-language channel back on W7 satellite operating at the 36 degrees East – a key location for broadcasting in Russia and other CIS states. GPB was also asking for reimbursement of financial damage caused by removal of the First Caucasian Channel from Eutelsat's satellite.

GPB claimed that Eutelsat infringed an agreement by putting First Caucasian, the channel mainly targeting audience in Russia and its North Caucasus, off the satellite less than two weeks after it started broadcasting in January 2010.

Eutelsat said that it had received „a firm commitment” from Intersputnik „for significantly more capacity than that requested by the Georgian broadcaster”.

⁷ <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=21854> (31 X 2013).

⁸ <http://www.lenta.ru/news/2010/01/29/stutnik> (31 X 2013).

⁹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eutelsat> (31 X 2013).

¹⁰ <http://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2010/01/27/01003-20100127ARTFIG00623-rumeurs-sur-l-arret-d-une-chaine-georgienne-antirusse-.php> (31 X 2013).

¹¹ <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=23076> (31 X 2013).

¹² <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/62770> (31 X 2013).

¹³ <http://www.globaljournalist.org/stories/2008/01/01/alania-tv/> (31 X 2013).

¹⁴ <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav052206a.shtml> (31 X 2013).

¹⁵ <http://www.linkedin.com/pub/maya-bichikashvili/10/4b7/65b> (31 X 2013).

Eutelsat has offered¹⁶ GPB to place the First Caucasian on W2A satellite as an alternative, but the offer was rejected by GPB, citing that the newly offered location was not properly covering the geographical area it was interested in. As it was said by David J. Smith, a Director of Georgian Security Analysis Center, „arguably legal in France or not, the real story here is that Eutelsat booted First Caucasian as a result of some combination of Russian money and pressure, likely with at least the acquiescence of the French Government.”¹⁷

Anyway, as soon the channel began to broadcast, Russian officials on the meeting in Vladikavkaz blamed the First Caucasian Channel as Georgia’s „anti-Russian propaganda” and an attempt to implant „ideology of extremism”¹⁸ in the North Caucasus. After the channel was removed from the satellite, it became available for viewers in Tbilisi only via cable networks and on internet.

„Georgian Public TV ordered a product in the form of a channel – said E. Kotrikadze to the BBC – We are a private company, which reports to the Georgian Public Broadcaster, but it has quite an impressive degree of independence.”¹⁹ Re-branded First Caucasian TV channel set to make a comeback. After a nine-month hiatus, the First Informational Caucasus or PIK (Pirveli Sanformacio Kavkasiuri²⁰), the Russian – language, Tbilisi – based satellite channel, has announced plans to resume broadcasting.

Therefore, the Georgian Public Broadcaster’s Russian-language channel, First Caucasian, handed over in management to a private firm, which received GEL 4,7 million (about USD 2,54 million) from the state to run the channel²¹. GEL 4,7 million is part of funding with total amount of GEL 7 million, which was allocated to GPB for the First Caucasian based on the government’s decree dated with 9 VII 2010.²²

So, according to a press release issued on 19 I 2011, the renewed channel was based in Tbilisi and focused on information, education and entertainment. Programs had to broadcast six hours a day from 6.00 pm, covering the North and South Caucasus, Ukraine, Belarus, Eastern Europe, Turkey, Russia and Iran. The channel owned and run by K-1, which announced its intention to examine the world’s least-known places, to include the peoples of the North and South Caucasus in the global information revolution, to provide the people of the Caucasus with objective and accurate information in a timely manner, and to introduce

¹⁶ <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=22509> (31 X 2013).

¹⁷ http://georgiandaily.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=19443&Itemid=132 (31 X 2013).

¹⁸ <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=21892> (31 X 2013).

¹⁹ http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/international/2011/01/110125_georgia_tv.shtml (31 X 2013).

²⁰ Transliteration in Georgian – პირველი საინფორმაციო კავკასიური.

²¹ <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=22525> (31 X 2013).

²² *Ibidem*.

new standards of journalism across the region. K-1 is a private firm established by the British journalist, Robert Parsons and Georgian national, Ekaterine Kotrikadze. Robert Parsons²³ speaks fluent Georgian and served as the channel's Director General.

„We would like to be a channel which is watched in order to learn what is happening in the Caucasus. For those who are doubtful about us, we have a simple answer: first watch and then judge” said Parsons²⁴ in the organization's statement. Aiming to cover the everyday and cultural lives of the peoples of the Caucasus, the channel developed a network of reporters in Baku, Yerevan, Moscow, Kyiv, Makhachkala, Ankara, Brussels, Washington, Vladikavkaz and Tehran.

PIK's programs were managed by a team of skilled journalists including: Robert Parsons, David Chater, Melanie Ernst and Zurab Kodolashvili. David Chater²⁵ is an award-winning former correspondent with more than 35 years experience in international television news, having worked for Independent Television News, Sky News and Al Jazeera English. In 1993 he moved to Russia to open a bureau for Sky News. While there he was awarded a Gold Medal as International Reporter of the Year for coverage of the Chechen war from Grozny²⁶. He reported from the conflict in Kosovo and the war in Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks, receiving a Gold Medal from the New York TV Festival for his reports on the siege of Kunduz²⁷.

Melanie Ernst²⁸ more than 20 years works in European, American and Middle Eastern TV stations. Besides the work on the television she is engaged into the social activities in the area of human rights. According to Melanie Ernst the true aim of the television „Kavkaz1” was professional presentation of the information to the people of the Caucasus about what is happening in the world.

Zurab Kodolashvili²⁹ is a former cameraman and video director for the BBC, CNN London and Sky News. He is the founder and leader of „Iberia” – the first independent news agency in Georgia. Zurab Kodolashvili filmed conflicts in Abkhazia, the Ingush – Ossetia conflicts and the first and the second wars in Chechnya.

Ekaterine Kotrikadze – worked in Georgia since 2007 as correspondent and presenter at Alania TV, staff correspondent at RTVi³⁰ and Ekho Moskvyy Radio.

²³ <http://www.coe.int/t/coefuture/Robert%20PARSONS.pdf> (31 X 2013).

²⁴ Typed from his message to the listers from the web-page of the channel <http://www.pik.tv>, which was deleted by owner – GPB.

²⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Chater (31 X 2013).

²⁶ <http://www.aljazeera.com/aboutus/2008/09/2008910114254204111.html#C> (31 X 2013).

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ Information from Maria Ekser <http://ekser.livejournal.com>, the former editor of the page <http://www.pik.tv>.

²⁹ <http://www.crewavenue.com/zuratv/> (31 X 2013).

³⁰ Currently works as a Head of News Department in RTVi in New York, <http://www.echo.msk.ru/blog/kotrikadze/> (31 X 2013).

Being ruled by an experienced team of journalists, Kanal PIK TV intended to transform the regional media environment through comprehensive news reporting, innovative web journalism, the best of Caucasian culture, critical, and independent journalism.

Taking into attention the names of the programs³¹, such as were „Territory of democracy”, „Civil journalism”, „Caucasian portrait”, „In a narrow circle” and slogans, like „democracy”, „transparency” and „freedom”, announced through the programs, the channel had clear aim to increase the level of democracy through information, to share the Caucasian view and the truth viewed from the Caucasus directly and without other sides interpretation.

Step by step channel PIK became a reliable source of unbiased and timely information in Russian, which offered a broad range of programs, documentaries and movies covered all the most important news stories. It was predictable that the channel came under the fire from Russian officials and commentators who claimed it would be used as an anti-Russian propaganda tool by Georgian government, and that its programs would seek to ferment extremist ideology in the North Caucasus.

The Russia-Georgia war³² in August 2008 clearly illustrated that the primary nature of the conflicts on the territory of Georgia has an international character. The Government of Georgia, supported by the consensus of the international community, believes that the Russian invasion and subsequent recognition took place in blatant violation of fundamental principles of international law, notably the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity³³. Georgia’s legal position³⁴ is supported by international law and norms, and reinforced by arrangements concluded during and after the August 2008 war; it is further reinforced by the statements of numerous international forums, including the EU-commissioned „Independent International Fact Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia” which confirmed the illegality of the secession of these regions from Georgia and rejected Russia’s arguments for its invasion and recognition.

Following the 2008 South Ossetia war in early August 2008, Russia recognized³⁵ Abkhazia³⁶ and South Ossetia as independent states on 26 VIII 2008. On 28 VIII 2008, Georgian Parliament passed a non-binding resolution calling on the Georgian government to sever diplomatic relations with Russia, what culminated on 29 VIII 2008 with Georgia severing diplomatic relations with Russia. In

³¹ <http://www.youtube.com/user/FirstCaucasian/videos?view=1> (31 X 2013).

³² http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wojna_w_Osetii_Południowej_2008 (31 X 2013).

³³ *State Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement Through Cooperation*, s. 3; <http://www.civil.ge/files/files/SMR-Strategy-en.pdf> (31 X 2013).

³⁴ *Ibidem*, s. 4.

³⁵ <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20080826/116291407.html> (31 X 2013).

³⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abkhazia> (31 X 2013).

response to Russia's occupation of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, in October 2008 the Georgian Parliament adopted the Law on Occupied Territories³⁷, defining a new legal regime that applies to the two regions. The Law on Occupied Territories was compiled in accordance with the Hague Regulations of 1907, the 4th Geneva Convention of 1949³⁸ and the norms of common international law. So called Russian-Georgian information war began far before Russian military intervention in August 2008.

In March 2000, as soon as Vladimir Putin was elected as a president³⁹ of Russian Federation, he declared that the whole post-Soviet space is the zone of Russian geopolitical interest. The fact that the CIS countries are a clear priority in the foreign policy of the Russian Federation demonstrates not only the decree of the President of Russia Boris Yeltsin of 14 IX 1995, in which the post-Soviet space is proclaimed „the first zone of interests of Russia”⁴⁰, but also confirms the unusual activity in the direction of Russian diplomacy of President Putin era⁴¹. His main task of the Russian Federation is to transform CIS countries into pro-Russian, the heads of which during the presidency of Boris Yeltsin⁴² attempted to contradict Moscow in integration issues. First of all, it is about Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, notably the countries that united into GUAM⁴³.

In 2011 „protected” Russian informational space reminded more than ever soviet propaganda: all the national channels were under the governmental control, periodically giving a dozen of freedom to the existing channel REN TV, which rating consists only of 14%, Radio Station Ekho Moskvу – only 4%, and there are left 3 newspapers per per cent each. In the internet situation is almost the same: the facebook, livejournal or twitter have per one per cent only.⁴⁴

Influence of the governmental propaganda in Russia was quite high. According to the survey of Public Opinion Foundation (ФОМ), on the question „from which resources citizens of Russia are getting information?”, 94% replied – from TV programs, from printed media – 30%, radio programs 27%, internet media – 20%, social networks: 8%.⁴⁵ If we take into attention the extent of the influence, in particular the case of the 2008 war, the Russian propaganda possessed real resources and opportunities to influence not only on the public opinion of Russia but on the whole spectrum entire post-Soviet space, including population of

³⁷ <http://www.smr.gov.ge/docs/doc216.pdf> (31 X 2013).

³⁸ <http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/COM/380-600177?OpenDocument> (31 X 2013).

³⁹ <http://putin.kremlin.ru/bio> (31 X 2013).

⁴⁰ М. С. Дорошко, *Геополітичне середовище та геополітична орієнтація країн СНД. Навчальний посібник*, Київ 2011, s. 51.

⁴¹ V. Putin presidency period 2000-2008, B. Yeltsin presidency period 1991-1999.

⁴² <http://state.kremlin.ru/president/allbio> (31 X 2013).

⁴³ <http://guam-organization.org/node/240> (31 X 2013).

⁴⁴ О. Панфилов, *op.cit.*, s. 9.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

Georgia. The last one was not only violated by military actions, but with information war as well.

Russian-Georgian information war went into another stage as soon as president of Georgia Eduard Shevardnadze started active cooperation with the NATO. After the „rose revolution” and double referendum⁴⁶ in January 2008, where 77% of Georgian population expressed a willingness to join NATO, information war was conducted parallelly with the preparation to the warfare. Propaganda used that times achieved the aim – it became real and Georgia became a new „scape-goat” for the Russian politicians.

According to New York Times, weeks before bombs started falling on Georgia, a security researcher in suburban Massachusetts was watching an attack against the country in cyberspace. Jose Nazario of Arbor Networks in Lexington noticed a stream of data directed at Georgian government sites containing the message: „win+love+in+Rusia”.⁴⁷ During the cyber war the internet is the one and most powerful tool to fight the war in the Internet space. Starting from 20th of July, quite before the tandem of real fight and cyber war had a place, including the August 2008, the world cyber detectives considered the most massive cyber attacks by private groups onto a government computer systems⁴⁸. After Russia – Georgia war a new term has emerged in the virtual world – Cyber war. The target websites during the Russia – Georgia cyber war became webpages of Parliament of Georgia, printed media, TV Company „Rustavi 2”, Tbilisi forum, the news agency „Civil.Ge”⁴⁹ hosted⁵⁰ in the United States and the pages of ministries. For example, on 11 VIII, the picture emerged on the page of Parliament of Georgia was collage of pictures⁵¹ of president of Georgia and Adolf Hitler.

Georgian webpages were recovered in the shortest time possible. The specialists from Baltic states as well as from U.S. helped to Georgian colleagues to manage the situation. A number of sites have been transferred to foreign servers, for instance, was created a special website – www.georgiamfa.blogspot.com, which is the government’s statements. In addition, the President of Poland, Lech Kaczynski’s official website – www.president.pl, housed in a special category – Information about the latest developments in Georgia⁵², where he also covered the official information about the events in Georgia.

According to the experience in other episodes of history, when powerful countries want to remark their power or just deliver a message to the rest of the

⁴⁶ <http://www.civil.ge/eng/category.php?id=90&result=plebiscite> (31 X 2013).

⁴⁷ J. Markoff, *Before the Gunfire, Cyberattacks*, „The New York Times”, 12 VIII 2008.

⁴⁸ <http://liberali.ge/ge/liberali/articles/102912/> (31 X 2013).

⁴⁹ <http://civil.ge/eng/category.php?id=84> (31 X 2013).

⁵⁰ <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,402406,00.html> (31 X 2013).

⁵¹ <http://www.nytimes.com/imagepages/2008/08/13/technology/13cyber.ready.html> (31 X 2013).

⁵² *Cyber attacks against Georgia: legal lessons identified*, Tallinn [november] 2008.

world, they don't send an ambassador or an emissary abroad like in times of Persians and Romans. This is not the way the fist hits the table, but the moment when small state is shown as a clear example of what might happen to other states in the similar situation in case they do not follow „the big brother's” advice.

Kanal PIK was a sort of a projector of the South Caucasus, which helped to distinguish the one who sent the „message” to the rest of the world and the one who was the tool. Politicians, public speakers, journalists, from the South and North Caucasus, Ukraine, Belarus, Russian Federation and Baltic states were speaking about the infringement and violation from the screen of the Kanal PIK. They were the representatives of the former USSR member states, who haven't open access to the media but who have what to say to the audience. For example, Vladimir Bukovsky⁵³ known as a leading member of the dissident movement of the 1960's and 1970's, writer, neurophysiologist, and political activist, the one of the first to expose the use of psychiatric imprisonment against political prisoners in the Soviet Union. He spent a total of twelve years in Soviet prisons, labor camps and in forced-treatment psychiatric hospitals, used by the government as special prisons. He is a member of the international advisory council of the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, who in 2001 received the Truman-Reagan Medal of Freedom. He was not just commented the demonstrations in Russia in 2011 via the channel PIK, but even came to Georgia and provided lectures and met with students and intelligence.

From another hand via the channel was making comments Andrey Nikolayevich Illarionov⁵⁴ a Russian libertarian economist and former economic policy advisor to the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin. In May 2000 he became the personal representative of the Russian president in the G8. He played an important role in introducing the low 13% flat income tax in Russia in repaying the Russian foreign debt, in creation the petroleum revenues-based Stabilization Fund of the Russian Federation and in bringing Russia's full-fledged membership in the political G8.

On 3 I 2005 Illarionov resigned from his position as presidential representative to the G8. In 1994 he founded independent and nonpolitical Institute of Economic Analyses⁵⁵, which finished Larisa Burakova⁵⁶, the author of the book „How Georgia managed it”⁵⁷. In the interview⁵⁸ to magazine „Continent”, A. Illarionov positively evaluated the reforms as well as supported many other steps

⁵³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Bukovsky (31 X 2013).

⁵⁴ He currently works as a senior fellow in the Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity at the Cato Institute in Washington, D.C.

⁵⁵ <http://www.iea.ru/about.php> (31 X 2013).

⁵⁶ <http://lib.rus.ec/a/185136> (31 X 2013).

⁵⁷ С. Бурасова, *Почему у Грузии получилось*, Москва 2011.

⁵⁸ <http://magazines.russ.ru/continent/2011/149/> (31 X 2013).

done by Georgian government. On the question „What is bad in Georgia”, he openly names Northern neighbor: „The threat. Constant threat of aggression”.⁵⁹

Through the Kanal PIK was speaking Andrei Piontkovsky – laureate of „Gold gong – 2001” in the field of international journalism and a member of International PEN Club.

Matthew Ganapolsky⁶⁰ – a Russian journalist, theater director, social activist, leading radio station „Ekho Moskvy”⁶¹ and member of Presidium of the Russian Jewish Congress was leading weekly news program „On the peak of the event”⁶² on the channel PIK and later another one together with Ekaterina Kotrikadze.

Valeria Novodvorskaia⁶³ – liberal Russian politician, Soviet dissident, the founder and the chairwoman of the „Democratic Union” party, and a member of the editorial board of The New Times. Many of her remarks have provoked controversy. She is openly critical of Russian government policies, including Chechen Wars, domestic policies of Vladimir Putin, and the alleged rebirth of Soviet propaganda in Russia. Her opinion as well delivered to wider audience through the Kanal PIK. More over, after she began to cooperate with PIK, she was invited to Tbilisi State University to give some lectures.

The process of the transition into democracy in the media and in the relations between the media and politics usually has its roots in a difficult situation in the country, poorly developed infrastructure, increasing disparities within a society and unstable political situation or authoritarian regime. In contemporary world mass media no longer perceived solely as a channel of communication. From an instrument of propaganda or an instrument of power the media have become a powerful source of power itself, which has transformed into the key of fame and success.

Besides known journalists and politicians, many civil activists were sharing truth related to the violation of human rights via the channel, which made accessible the information to the wide range of Russian speaking audience. One of such examples, is the video of the colonel Oleg Alkaev⁶⁴, who headed the number 1 prison in Minsk from 1996 to 2001. In 2006, he wrote a book about his experiences and agreed to an interview with Amnesty International in 2008.

In the interview⁶⁵, he describes how Belarusian death row inmates were not told they were to be executed until minutes before their death, and their families

⁵⁹ <http://magazines.russ.ru/continent/2011/149/i101.html>; А. Н. Илларионов, *Угроза. Постоянная угроза агрессии*, „Континент. Россия и мир” 2011, nr 149.

⁶⁰ https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ганопольский,_Матвей_Юрьевич (31 X 2013).

⁶¹ <http://www.echo.msk.ru/> (31 X 2013).

⁶² In Russian: „На Пике событий”.

⁶³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valeriya_Novodvorskaya (31 X 2013).

⁶⁴ http://old.ucpb.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=58170:200401160000-28167&catid=110&Itemid=311 (31 X 2013).

⁶⁵ <http://www.amnesty.ch/de/laender/europa-zentralasien/weissrussland/dok/2013/aktion-todesstrafe/bericht-ending-executions-in-europe.-towards-abolition-of-the-death-penalty>

were never told their relatives had been executed – only that they had left the prison, and they would not be able to see them again.

Amnesty International, has publicized the video as a part of their campaign against the death penalty. Belarus is the last executioner⁶⁶ country in Europe that practices the death penalty. According to Belarusian information agency BelpAN, the country executed 278 prisoners from 1992 to 2010⁶⁷.

Another painful topic highlighted by the PIK was the Northern Caucasus and namely Chechnya. The movies made by Anastasya Khnyakina: „War in Chechnya – People”, about two military campaigns and 250 000 dead⁶⁸. What really happened in Chechnya? Many people heard, but very few talk about it. The film was accessible only on the PIK’s web page⁶⁹, which isn’t available anymore. The movie was about the exclusive interviews given by Chechens from all over the Europe. Another movie as well available on the page was „War in Chechnya – Men in Uniforms”, the movie about people who survived the slaughterhouse.

The both movies and Alkaev’s story, as well as other videos and recorded interviews were put on the special page on the website of the Kanal PIK, which could be not just viewed but downloaded.

All the examples of people participating in the forming the channel, its functioning and active broadcasting played an important role not only in the opening the real discussion between the civil society and the government about the meaning of mass media in Georgia and the whole South Caucasus, but as well made possible the expression of own opinions to the representatives of other countries of the former Soviet Union facing the similar problems. Kanal PIK filled up the gap of an informational vacuum, which was more than just obvious in the post soviet union space. While the channel was functioning, the arena was opened for the opposition and pro-governmental positions, for those who were ready to speak to the public openly and discuss painful questions together with the audience.

The existence of Russian speaking channel in Georgia, which 20% of territory is occupied by Russian Federation, was not just an instrument of soft power of Georgia, but a real distinction itself between the norms when the state governs on its level and people can communicate and not just observe. The public debate, which became more clear via the Kanal PIK, included protest demonstrations and vigils initiated by citizens, social movements, interest groups and rhetoric of

-in-belarus.-2009-38-p (31 X 2013); *Amnesty International. Ending Executors in Europe. Towards abolition of the death penalty in Belarus* [2009], s. 9.

⁶⁶ *Amnesty International. Commonwealth of Independent States: Belarus – the sole executioner*, [26 IX] 2007, s. 4.

⁶⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capital_punishment_in_Belarus (31 X 2013).

⁶⁸ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tWminXDkJa8> (31 X 2013).

⁶⁹ <http://pik.tv/en/chechnya/film/2036> (31 X 2013).

different political parties. On the other hand through these expressions of public opinion, citizens tried to attract the interest of media, other citizens and political decision-makers to the issues at state and in so doing generate kind of civil influence. The last one wasn't accomplished in the end, because the channel was closed as soon the new leading party came into the power⁷⁰.

The existence of such a channel was about a possibility to make an informed choice. So how Georgia overcomes the threats to freedom of expression given that the authorities do not allow media to be totally free, the opposition blames the media for their own failures, producers- not journalists – frame the news, journalists exercise extreme self-censorship and the public is simply not ready to accept western-style neutral reporting? Journalists say the best way to improve the media is to elevate the level of professionalism among journalists⁷¹.

The long term solution may be the creation of the new brand of journalists, who will make their roles as public watchdogs seriously and create space for alternative public debate and critical journalism. In terms of legislation, as Robert Parsons mentioned in his interview to Georgian magazine „Tabula”: „I think the government has probably done all that needs to be done. What really needs to be done now, in terms of development of the media, is that the government should not be involved in editorial decision-making”⁷². In general government has to take „hands off” media and labeling TV channels as pro-governmental or pro-opposition. After all, what matters in democracy is that everyone has the right to freedom of expression.

Kanal PIK was a projector of the South Caucasus and sort of a loudhailer of the countries from the coverage area, which is used to intend and to transform the regional media environment through the comprehensive news reporting, innovative web journalism, the best of Caucasian culture, critical, and independent journalism. The channel fulfilled one of its aims to „Bring the world to the Caucasus and the Caucasus to the world”⁷³.

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⁷⁰ *Report on The Elections of the Parliament of Georgia 2012*, Tbilisi 2012, http://cesko.ge/files/2012/REPORT_2012_-NEW.pdf (31 X 2013).

⁷¹ N. Danelia, N. Gogiberidze, *Effects – Impacts of media in Georgia*, Tbilisi 2008, s. 41.

⁷² <http://www.tabula.ge/en/story/70171-parsons-channels-that-dominate-georgia-are-media-dinosaurs> (31 X 2013).

⁷³ <http://www.daymohk.net/cgi-bin/orsi3/index.cgi?id=40384> (31 X 2013).